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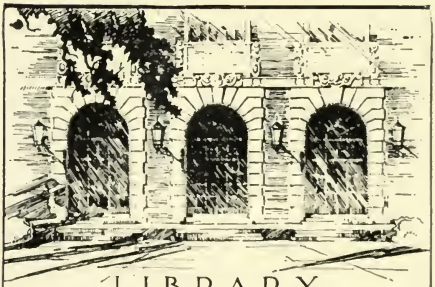

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AT HOME.

VOL. III.

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AT HOME.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

ENGLISH FASHIONABLES ABROAD.

Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
While Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train,
And garters, stars, and coronets appear,
And, in soft sounds, "Your Grace" salutes their ear.

POPE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1828.

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ENGLISH FASHIONABLES AT HOME.

CHAPTER I.

CROSS PURPOSES.

Shake hands for ever; cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen, in either of our brows,
That we one jot of former love retain.

MICHAEL DRAYTON.

IT was some days before Julia again had opportunity of speaking to Lord Calvert; although a faint hope fluttered at her heart that he would at least make an effort to ascertain whether he would, or would not be included in Lady Harriet's list of morning visitors.

Probably it was owing to this unacknowledged speculation that her toilet was so carefully attended to on the morning after Lady Coleraine's ball: she found, too, in the course of the day, a variety of reasons for preferring the front drawing-room to her usual favourite, the library; and even in cutting her pencils, repairing her pens, and performing such other little operations as required the immediate light of the window, she took more time than they generally occupied; all which was no doubt occasioned by the evident abstraction of her thoughts.

"I could not have mistaken his words; certainly he distinctly asked me if I would admit him in a morning: perhaps he wishes to explain the cause of his apparent inconsistency: perhaps he wishes to renew the same kind, friendly, happy intercourse of our early years. Why was I such a fool—such a weak, vain fool, as to misconstrue his words and actions? Alas! shame! shame upon me! he must have seen my error—my inexperience—my

ignorance: he has taken this painful, but necessary line of conduct, to correct my mistake; and I have resented what I should have been grateful for! If he would but call upon us, I would show him that I have at last rightly understood his meaning."

One thought, one transient thought, crossed her mind, that if she appeared to sanction Fitzosborne's addresses, it would at least convince Lord Calvert that she could have no preference for *him;* but the thought was only transient. She heard a sharp, quick knock at the door, and the sound of, as she thought, boots coming up stairs, as the servants resigned from one to another, in their long file, the charge of ushering in a visitor. Quick beat her pulse, and rapid were the changes in her varying colour; but as she heard the further door open, she distinguished Lady Harriet's voice in salutation of "Fitzosborne;" and the next instant Julia was a voluntary prisoner in her own dressing-room.

Visitor after visitor succeeded, but no Lord

Calvert appeared; nor had she, even in their drive, an opportunity of practising the cordial bow she had fully determined to salute him with, as she only saw him at a distance, cantering into Hyde Park by one gate as their carriage drove out of it at another.

Nor were the evening engagements more fortunate; although, in the new-born hope of exculpating herself in Lord Calvert's eyes, she accompanied Lady Harriet to every party where there seemed to be a probability of meeting him. but either he came in when they were going away, or she overheard some person say that Lord Calvert was just gone to the very house she had last come from; or some disagreeable person—and most frequently Fitzosborne was the one—who, talking to her at the very moment when Lord Calvert came up to speak to Lady Harriet, allowed her no opportunity of recognising him.—Once, at a concert at the Duchess of Durham's, chance seemed to favour her views:—Lady Harriet Moreton was sitting down, and there being

no room for Julia, she stood beside her, totally disengaged, when she saw Lord Calvert within a few paces of her. Their eyes met—and her long-determined bow of kindness was at last effected.—But in vain.—A cold, formal, almost repulsive salutation, was all she received in return; whilst, to make the contrast still more remarkable, he remained within speaking distance of her, without further notice, till a change of seats enabled him to approach Lady Harriet, when she saw him gaily enter into conversation with her ladyship, in that animated, unembarrassed manner for which he was always remarkable.

It now appeared to her that the impediments to an explanation were not purely accidental on his part; and she was confirmed in this belief a few mornings afterwards, when, as she was standing at the window at Lord Alton's drawing-room, she saw Lord Calvert enter the court-yard which separated the house from the street: he looked up, and a slight, almost involuntary salutation marked his having

recognised her: but she saw him leave his three visiting-cards, without even asking if the ladies were at home; and she saw, too, that Fitzosborne, whom she had left in the other room with Lady Harriet, at the same instant had descended the stairs, and soon after overtaking Lord Calvert, he passed his arm through his, and they walked away together.

One only consolation remained to poor Julia, and that was, the belief that she had for ever prevented Lionel speaking to Lord Calvert on her subject, by the pains she had taken to convince him of the erroneous suspicions he had imbibed of her partiality to his Lordship. Fitzosborne, indeed, had never spoken to her so openly on the subject, either of his own feelings or hers, since the evening of Lady Coleraine's ball. But a thousand little inuendoes—a passing observation—a look—an action which, to others, bore no meaning—all continued, as different links, the chain of those reflections which were seldom absent from the mind of either. It seemed as if they had a language

peculiar to themselves. Julia scarcely discouraged it, so impatient did she feel under the slightest imputation of cherishing an unrequited love: nor was she fully aware of all the confirmation of his hopes, which she thus so unconsciously afforded to Lionel in the increasing intimacy which was fostered, not only by this unguarded conduct on the part of Julia, but also by the daily kindnesses of Lord Alton.

Perhaps the feeling betwixt contempt and distrust, which the earl had long cherished towards Lord Tralee, and which had uniformly occasioned him to repel all approaches to his acquaintance, induced Lord Alton to view with more lenity the character of Lionel, on a principle of impartiality and justice carried possibly to too great an excess of refinement. Fitzosborne's merits, such as they were, he readily and even cordially acknowledged. The refinement of his manners; the versatility of his talents; the cultivation of his taste; his almost universal information, and the apparent equanimity of his temper, all found in him an able

and therefore an approving judge. Of his principles he could know nothing; but of his attachment to Miss Fielding he became daily more convinced: and although, as an individual, Lord Alton still infinitely preferred the more open manly character of Lord Calvert; yet the preference which he still believed Julia felt for Lionel, and perchance a latent feeling that his marriage with her would be in some degree a contradiction to any reports which might have circulated to the prejudice of Lady Harriet's reputation; all these circumstances combined to render Lord Alton far from averse to his niece's union with Fitzosborne.

Thus the nets which had been so carefully woven round Julia, seemed daily more and more to entangle her: nor did the patient victim of those deep designs feel any longer a desire to emancipate herself from the toils. It is true that London became hourly more distasteful to her; and with a secret impatience did she look forward to the time when Mr. Fielding had promised to recall her to the rectory: but she

felt too grateful for her uncle's unremitting kindnesses to express a wish to accelerate that period, and she sank unresistingly under the decree of fate; like him who, yielding to the insidious gale, which brings death on the softest wings that ever fanned the shores of Italy, and lulled into security, first sleeps—then dreams—and wakes but in eternity.

Under other circumstances, the maternal kindness of Lady Ellesmere, or the steady friendship of her daughters, might have been a solace to the motherless girl. But the peculiar circumstances in which she and Lord Calvert now so unaccountably found themselves, were precisely those on which Julia could brook no condolence. Lord Calvert's manners to her were never otherwise than polite. She complained that they were *only* those of a mere common acquaintance. But what claim could she adduce to any other designation? To blame him, was to condemn herself; and thus more than ever was his subject interdicted between her and his family.

Another circumstance contributed gradually to loosen the bonds between Julia and the Ellesmeres. Lady Harriet Moreton scarcely concealed her repugnance to them; and Julia, now become doubly timid of herself, feared to go to St. James's Square as often as she wished to do, lest it should seem that she sought Lord Calvert's society, as in truth the beatings of her truant heart told her she never stopped at his father's door without anticipating his presence both with fear and hope. Besides, they were not exactly in the same set in London; and every body knows what an invisible, but invincible barrier that is to even the strongest friendships.

Each person in London feels himself the centre of a circle, whether large or small, that is continually turning round. Other orbits strike occasionally against the one in which they move; but it is difficult to find any two persons whose circumstances are so exactly similar as to admit of their having precisely the same sphere or even the same horizon.

Lady Harriet Moreton and Lady Ellesmere had, it is true, many acquaintances in common; and it was evident that their visiting lists became daily more assimilated, partly through the agency of Lord Alton; but their hours were as dissimilar as their characters: and it is astonishing how wide a difference sometimes proceeds from a diversity in one single point, even on subjects more important than a London visiting list. Lady Harriet once observed that the sets of London might be compared to different shades of the same dye. "I call the Duchess of Chester and Lady Hauteville," said she, "scarlet and crimson; each extremes, but of different hues. Lady Coleraine's set is like the old-fashioned *coquelicot*—a colour *bien prononcée,* but somewhat mixed. Lady Ellesmere is a deep red, somewhat inclining to Lady Hauteville's crimson; but many degrees higher than poor Lady Tralee Whilst Lady Weldon comes in at last, half-dipped like a blush rose. I know no shade lower."

But, however, whilst Lady Harriet might

affect to ridicule, as far as she dared, the high unbending character of Lady Ellesmere and her daughters, Lady Matilda was gradually obtaining the esteem and love of all whom she admitted to her confidence. But to her beloved brother she principally devoted those silent, soothing attentions which are the surest solace of many a painful trial, which is perhaps more difficult to bear from the circumstance of appearing too contemptible to require the exertion of fortitude.

She saw that Lord Calvert, under the mask of gaiety and dissipation, was far from happy: a few words that had fallen from him, led her to hope that he would himself seek that confidential communication with her which she, in a moment of pique, had vowed not again to solicit; and, in this view, she one morning delightedly accepted his proposals to drive her in his curricle, as he frankly added that he was anxious to have some private conversation with her.

Lady Matilda thought Piccadilly would never

end; and that the carts, and waggons, and coaches, and vans, that succeeded to the motionless equipages in Hyde Park, were equally interminable. At last, a comparatively open road seemed to leave Lord Calvert at leisure, and she anxiously reminded him that he had something to say to her.

"I do, indeed, Matilda, want to speak to you very seriously; I want to submit to you a proposal from Lord Alton."

"A proposal from Lord Alton! What do you mean, Oswald?" And Lady Matilda blushed almost through her gloves.

"Not such a proposal as you are thinking of—ha! ha! ha! Come, don't look as if you were going to cry, Matilda. *Le bon temps viendra.* I have a notion, even, that one is not very far off—eh? I see you understand me. But now—"

"How can you be so provoking, Calvert? I thought you were going to be serious."

"Well, so I am; only I wanted, *en passant,* just to see how the land lay, as old Admiral

Gunnel would say. But now, having pretty well ascertained that the wind is all fair—"

"Upon my word, brother, I don't understand you; I wish you would explain yourself, or change the conversation."

"Excellent!—bravo! I wish Lord Alton heard you. But now to be serious in very truth: Can you keep a secret, Matilda?"

"If you doubt me, don't trust me."

"Good again. No bad motto for your proud little Ladyship. You must know then, Matilda, every thing is arranged between Lord Alton and the Duke; and he comes into administration immediately after Easter."

"I am delighted to hear it. His talents, his—"

"Are beyond even your praise, Matilda; but you will be surprised to hear—or, indeed, perhaps you will not be surprised—who knows?" and Lord Calvert looked with a provoking smile in her face: "however that may be, Lord Alton has offered me the choice of two most gratifying situations, and I want your advice which to choose."

"What are they?" exclaimed Lady Matilda eagerly.

"One is in the Ministry at home; it would, I acknowledge, gratify my utmost hopes, as it would afford me that opportunity of distinguishing myself, and which I have so long sought for."

"Then why, Oswald, hesitate for a moment in accepting it?"

Lord Calvert sighed:—"The other situation now at my option is a mission to Russia."

"To Russia—Calvert! Surely you will not again leave England?—leave all who love you?"

"Love me, Matilda!—Yes, dear girl, *you* love me as well as ever sister loved a brother. But, Matilda, I am weary sick of England; I cannot, will not stay to see—." He whipped his horses as if they could bear him from himself.

Matilda guessed, or fancied she guessed, to what he alluded: she paused for him to continue; but as he remained silent, she repressed her surprise at this kindness of Lord Alton's;

adding, she was not aware that he and the Earl were so intimate.

"I should be insincere, Matilda," rejoined Lord Calvert, "if I did not attribute much of his kindness to the Earl's partiality to—to our family; for, indeed, he has so expressed himself. When I first came to town, he sought my society in a manner which I should have been vain, indeed, to have considered only as a tribute to my own merits; and now I see him almost every day."

"Every day!—Where?—Not at his own house?"

"Sometimes at the office in Downing Street; but oftener at his own house."

"You surprise me!—and Julia?—Lady Harriet Moreton?"

"Oh! I never see or ask for them;—we gentlemen can sometimes live without your all-cheering smiles. What says the old epigram—

> Now we have lived three months asunder,
> How I lived with you is the wonder.

Lady Matilda shook her head, as if in contradiction of this boast: the gay smile soon passed from Lord Calvert's animated countenance, and a mournful expression followed. After a pause, he continued, "Julia!—no. Since you have named her, Matilda, I will tell you that I have almost determined never to see her again; and that, in truth, is what has decided me to go to Russia."

"Good God!—and why?"

"I suppose you know she is to be married to Fitzosborne?"

"I do not, cannot believe it; and yet—"

"It is very true: Lord Alton spoke to me himself on the subject."

"And did *he* tell you she was to marry him?"

"Not that exactly; but he told me he had little doubt of their mutual attachment. Of *his*, indeed, I was aware before:—but of hers!—"

For a moment neither spoke. At last, Lady Matilda recovered herself:—"But even so, Calvert. If Julia is so—if Miss Fielding does

marry that man, why should you expatriate yourself?—other views—"

"Matilda, I am not at liberty to tell you every thing; but I am afraid an unpleasant crisis is now suspended over the head of Fitzosborne's father: if my fears are verified, his prospects in life will be changed indeed!—nor can I see, in that case, how he could marry Julia, unless I resigned the home situation in his favour: for the mission to Russia is pledged, if I refuse it."

"And Oswald!—dearest brother! would you make such a sacrifice for one who—"

"Yes, Matilda, for Julia: to ensure her happiness, I feel I could; but I could not stay to see her married to another: in a short time—in a few years, perhaps, when I have learnt to forget all I once so fondly remembered—"

"But, Calvert, are you sure—are you certain this Fitzosborne—"

"Yes—yes, Matilda, I have heard it from himself: it was only the other day, when I

went to leave my name for Lady Harriet and Miss Fielding, I saw her—Julia, I mean—standing at the window, as he was coming down stairs: it was easy to see who she was watching. He came out of the house, sparkling with joy and triumph; and who could wonder at his happiness? He overtook me before I got out of Lord Alton's Court; and in the fulness of his heart told me all—every thing. Yes—yes, Matilda, Russia's the best.—Silver bear-skins for you, and brandy and cigars for me. How do you think I shall become my new dignity?"

They now again turned into the Park; and Lord Calvert's attention appeared solely occupied in guiding his spirited horses through the congregated carriages, whilst Lady Matilda had so many passing bows to return, and so many good-byes to say, that the conversation was not further resumed; and they reached St. James's Square just in time to make their toilet before dinner.

CHAPTER II.

THE ACCUSER.

My lord, my lord ! I'm not that abject wretch
You think me : patience ! where's the distance throws
Me back so far, but I may speak,
Though proud oppression will not hear me?

VENICE PRESERVED.

THE next morning, Lord Calvert received a note from Lord Alton, requesting him to call upon him at an appointed hour. On his entrance, he found him in appearance more agitated than he had ever before perceived him; but the kindness of his welcome was by no means diminished.

"A most unpleasant circumstance has occurred," said the Earl, as soon as they were seated. "You are aware, my Lord, of the dark hints which the Duke threw out, both to you and me, respecting a fraud lately practised in levying his last tax; and of the suspicions which his Grace almost avowedly pointed at Lord Tralee."

"I think they almost amounted to direct accusations," replied Lord Calvert.

"Lord Tralee and I are scarcely acquainted: indeed, I have always rather avoided him, as we by no means agree in politics; and the only intercourse we ever had, till lately, was a great many years ago, when his interference might have injured me materially. When he discovered who he had been acting against, his apologies were so exaggerated, that I considered them anything but *l'amende honorable;* and consequently, we have scarcely spoken since."

Lord Calvert was at a loss to guess where this exordium pointed; but in a few minutes Lord Alton continued—"You, I am sure, Calvert, can understand my feelings, when I

say that the very circumstance of Lord Tralee having once been my enemy, renders it peculiarly irksome to me now to be constituted his judge; and yet I am afraid that that duty will, in some degree, devolve upon me."

"I am not surprised to hear you say so," answered Lord Calvert; "as I rather anticipated it, from what the Duke said the other day."

"In truth, the disagreeable office has been forced upon me in a singular manner. The first intelligence of the fraud itself was given anonymously to the Duke, which led him to institute the inquiries he spoke of; and the result of these measures was the discovery of an enormous train of iniquity, in which one Willis seemed, at first, the only person implicated. By degrees a clue was found, which seemed to lead beyond him; but no positive evidence against Lord Tralee was obtained: till, strange to say, by the infatuation of overstrained policy, I am afraid he has given one himself."

"That is, indeed, contrary to his usual cun-

ning," replied Lord Calvert. The Earl continued—

"The day before yesterday I received a note from Lord Tralee, requesting an audience of me either at his own house or mine: in truth, Calvert, I imagined this desired audience related to family arrangements; I mean to allude to his son, who, you must have perceived, is paying his addresses to my niece; and, indeed, this adds to my embarrassment: however, to go on, Lord Tralee called upon me, and after a good deal of circumlocution, and certainly evident embarrassment on his part, I at last succeeded in extracting from him the actual purport of his visit; at least I think so, for really he was so cautious as to be nearly unintelligible."

"And did his purpose relate to Fitzosborne and Miss Fielding?" As Lord Calvert said this, he stooped down to pick up the glove which a moment before had fallen on the ground.

"Yes—to a certain degree; but that subject was rather the excuse than the purport of his

visit. He said, with an appearance of the utmost frankness and candour, that he wished to speak to me on the subject of this excise business; in which he found to his utter astonishment his own name had been implicated through the villany of a man named Willis, who was the person he had employed to execute the Duke's orders."

"Then Lord Tralee acknowledged his having employed this Willis?"

"He did; and thus supplied a link in the chain, which till then was wanting. But Lord Tralee even went farther on the road to his own undoing. Having paid me a superfluity of compliments which I by no means wished to receive, and having inferred, or rather inquired whether I was not going to take office—a fact I scarcely could deny, he suddenly burst out into the most violent protestations of personal friendship for me; and finally, offered to give me up a confidential letter written to him by the Duke, authorizing the very extortions of which the Duke now affects to complain."

"Have you got the letter, my Lord?"

"No; I refused to be accessary to such a wanton breach of confidence, but I could not prevent his reading out to me the greatest part of it."

"And does the Duke's letter really go so far as to exculpate his Grace, and exonerate Lord Tralee?" inquired Lord Calvert in evident surprise.

"Not that exactly; though certainly it is a most unguarded letter; and, as Lord Tralee read it out to me—I mean with the emphasis which he used on particular passages—it certainly is an unpleasant document to be in the hands of an enemy."

"But surely if past favours can insure gratitude, Lord Tralee must be the Duke's friend."

"Ah! Calvert, in politics, favours oftener cancel friendships than confirm them. It is a dark, heartless science, unless the lamp of patriotism sheds its purest beams; and even then the patriot lives a daily victim, and seldom gains a wreath but at his death."

"A bad prospect for me, my Lord, who am

only just starting for the prize," said Lord Calvert, gaily.

"But I shall nevertheless be disappointed if *your* race is not long and glorious; even though, as Pope says,

> Oh save my country, Heaven!

shall be your last. However, to return to a far different line of policy, Lord Tralee's abuse of the Duke was only paralleled by his praise of me. It was evident that he considered my taking office as the signal of the Duke's resignation; and that he was by no means aware of the coalition that has actually taken place between us. The result was, as far as I could discover (for, as I told you, Lord Tralee was peculiarly circumspect), that it is at my option to secure Lord Tralee's support to any measure I may propose; and that he is only waiting my signal to declare open hostility to the Duke, by giving up the letter to me, or to any person I may appoint."

"And may I ask your Lordship how you

mean to act? If you take the letter, it will give the Duke an opportunity of exculpating himself."

"Yes; but it would ruin Lord Tralee; and, perhaps, it is yet *possible*, that Lord Tralee may not be guilty; however, these are by no means all my difficulties: a person who affects a degree of mystery that in itself argues against his probity, has several times thrown himself in the way of my secretary, and declared in no very qualified manner, that he was the only person in existence who could unravel the mystery of this excise transaction; and at last he has gone so far as to say, that although he will neither give his name or address, he will have no objection to communicate the particulars to me, in a personal interview, although he positively refuses to give any further information to my secretary."

"And have you seen this man yet?"

"No; I had yesterday a communication on the subject with the Duke: I gave him to understand, as far as I could without actually

compromising Lord Tralee, that his Lordship vindicated himself in the whole business, on the grounds of his Grace's authority for all his actions. I then told the Duke about the offer of this anonymous informer; and I frankly submitted the decision to him, as to whether I should, or should not, grant him the interview he asked."

"And what was the Duke's decision?"

"With an ingenuous boldness, which at once proved to me his innocence, he requested me to admit the man as soon as possible, saying, that his only wish, as well as his decided intention, was to sift the whole business to the bottom; and that without delay."

"Did he say anything about his own letter?"

"He said that he had no recollection of ever having written to Lord Tralee on the subject, as their communications were always verbal; but he perfectly remembered having once had occasion to correspond with his Lordship on a very different business: but that for better certainty he would refer to the copies of his

letters, and in the mean time he earnestly entreated me to see this man."

"To which, of course, your Lordship consented?"

"Yes, on one condition—that a mutual friend should be present at the interview. The Duke named you, Calvert; and I want to know if it will be disagreeable to you; I expect him here almost immediately."

Lord Calvert felt sensibly the compliment which had thus been paid to him by two of the highest characters in England; but he also felt an embarrassment in being thus implicated in a transaction so materially affecting the interests of Fitzosborne; however, his desire to be useful to one who had been so unexpectedly kind to him, determined him to accede to Lord Alton's request; and he had scarcely notified his assent, when the secretary entered and informed the Earl, that the person he expected was in attendance.

In a few moments the man made his appearance. A short, thick figure was closely enve-

loped in a dark shaggy coat, which, from the dimensions of its cape and the fulness of the skirt, sufficiently answered the purpose of disguise, as far at least as to personal proportions. A yellow spotted handkerchief covered much of the lower part of his face; and a slouch hat was drawn so low on his forehead, that nothing was visible but a pair of sharp gray eyes, whose expression was at once keen and disagreeable.

His bow was protracted till the secretary left the room; when, as soon as the door closed behind him, the man looked up, without taking off his hat, but started when he perceived *two* gentlemen waiting to receive him.

"My business was *only* with Lord Alton," said he, after a moment's pause, as he cast a glance towards Lord Calvert.

"Sir," replied the Earl sternly, "*I* am Lord Alton; before you proceed I must inform you, that this gentleman is my friend, and intends to be present during the whole of our conversation."

"I asked a *private* interview," replied the stranger sulkily.

"The interview was solely granted on your *own* solicitation. The conditions on which I have granted it are, that this gentleman is present at it. It remains at your option to accept or refuse these conditions; in the latter case, you are at full liberty to withdraw."

There was a haughty sternness in Lord Alton's manner, as he uttered these words, that seemed to surprise, if not to intimidate, the person he addressed. After the pause of a few seconds the latter resumed—

"I desire at least to know the name of the person who thus obtrudes himself on a conference intended to be perfectly confidential."

"My name, sir, is"—Lord Alton hastily interrupted Lord Calvert, and addressed the stranger.

"You have yourself set an example of secrecy, which is at least unnecessary, if your purposes are honest. When you favour me

with your own name, perhaps I may inform you of that of this gentleman."

"I came here to give valuable information, not to be dictated to in this manner." And the man turned towards the door, as if intending to retire. His hand was on the lock, but he paused, in expectation of being recalled. Finding that both gentlemen remained obstinately silent, he again turned round hesitatingly, and inquired if his Lordship had any further commands?

"None whatever," replied Lord Alton, in a tone of perfect indifference. "If you do not choose to fulfil the purport of your visit, the sooner you retire the better;" and the Earl laid his hand on the bell.

"If I give you the information you require, what security can I have, that I may not be myself betrayed?"

"A security *you* cannot understand—the honour of gentlemen," hastily rejoined the indignant Lord Calvert.

"You are too hasty, my good friend," said Lord Alton, with a good-natured smile. Then turning to the stranger he continued—"We must be more explicit. How do you mean betrayed? Your information, whatever it may be, will be useless, unless it can be acted upon."

"What I mean is very intelligible. If I make to you a complete discovery of the iniquities which are, and have been, carrying on in the revenue, I must stipulate, that you do not give me up, as the author of your information, to those persons whose dishonesty I am about to reveal."

"You have secured yourself from that possibility, as we neither know your name nor countenance," said Lord Calvert contemptuously, for his honest pride could scarcely brook the man's treacherous polity.

"Then you consider yourselves bound by that wonderful security—gentlemen's honour!—not to betray my name, should it ever come to your ears—nor my features, should you ever recognise them?"

"Agreed!—proceed"—said Lord Alton.

"And the young gentleman, is he agreed? You may, sir, have seen me before; or you may meet me in society again?"

"I think I *have* seen you before; where, I cannot recollect. As to *my* meeting *you* in society, I should think it not likely; however, except to Lord Alton, I shall never boast of the honour of your acquaintance."

A smile, rather of derision than of pleasure, played over the small proportion of the stranger's countenance which was visible. With a firm, quick, but at the same time deliberate step, he walked, or rather strode into the middle of the room, rubbing his hands closely together; whilst he seemed to ponder his next sentence. Lord Alton was still seated in the same careless position in which the stranger found him. Lord Calvert, whose less practised feelings were more impatient of restraint, had risen from the couch and now stood leaning on the chimney-piece, eyeing the stranger with looks of scorn; whilst

an empty chair, which the man was not invited to occupy, stood opposite. He approached it, and leaning over the back, looked for a moment doubtfully towards both the gentlemen. At last, in a compressed voice, he again spoke.

"I believe, then, all is settled, except the terms on which my information must be given."

"That entirely depends on its value," answered Lord Alton.

"My demands are reasonable. There has been a defalcation in the revenue to the amount of above fifty thousand pounds. I only ask a tithe of what the proofs I can give will enable you to recover: mind, *proofs* is the word I use; and further, I demand a small sum paid down, to enable me to provide for my own safety."

"I am not authorised to agree to any such conditions, but I will communicate your demand," replied Lord Alton sternly.

"I shall not abate them; and the information I can give, is what you can obtain through no other channel."

"Perhaps you are not aware that we have

already had some communications with Mr. Willis."

"Ha!—did Willis anticipate me after all?" and in his agitation his hat fell somewhat off his brow."

"When you put me in possession of what *you* allude to, I shall know whether he has anticipated it or not."

"Did he tell you under whose orders he acted?" and the piercing gray eyes of the speaker glanced quickly towards both his auditors.

"Lord Tralee, whom I have already seen upon this subject, did not deny having given some authority; however, Mr. Willis may have exaggerated his orders."

"The arch villain!—and has he abandoned the innocent man, whom he betrayed, to shelter his own guilt by the sacrifice of his victim?"

"If Mr. Willis has been unjustly accused, he will have future opportunity of asserting his innocence."

"Never, never—the man is dead. *I—I*

only can unravel the mystery." As the man said this, triumph glanced in his eyes; his short, ungainly figure swelled in self-importance; one arm was stuck fiercely at his side, whilst with the other he almost unconsciously moved his hat; but it was in a peculiar manner; for instead of touching it either in the front or at the side, he passed his hand to the back of his head, and raising his hat an inch or two behind, allowed it to fall again over his eyes. It was a sudden, but evidently characteristic action into which the speaker was impelled by a momentary excitation of feeling.

"Dead! Is Willis dead?" exclaimed Lord Alton, shocked at the savage triumph of his interlocutor.

"He is—his children are beggars, and his wife driven friendless and houseless on the world: so much for the patronage, the friendship, the gratitude, ay, the very promises of Lord Tralee."

A pause of some minutes succeeded: at last, the stranger continued:—"If I can bring you

proof—irrefragable proof, that Willis was innocent—that he acted solely under the orders of Lord Tralee himself; that that arch villain alone received the spoil, and then left his poor misguided agent to starve, as the reward of his fidelity; if I *prove* all this, will you then consent to give me the terms I asked? It is not yet too late to punish guilt, though Willis, poor man, *is* gone."

"I should think, if you are really an honest man, the vindication of his innocence would be a sufficient recompense," said Lord Calvert.

"And do you think I would take the trouble of vindicating any man's character?—much less run the risk I now run for one that's dead. No, no; not even the paltry sum *you* think so much of would tempt me to such folly."

"Then what *can* be your inducement?" inquired Lord Calvert, in surprise.

"Revenge, sir!—revenge. I have the honour to be related to Lord Tralee, sir; or rather to his Lady; for, thank God, no portion of his villanous blood runs in my veins. I

scorn the imputation with more bitterness than his proud Lordship dares to deny my connexion. But no matter. Time may come when he may crouch as humbly as I have ere now crouched to him. However, let that pass:—no person has ever solaced *my* feelings, and why should I obtrude them upon any? As I was saying, sir, I have in my possession some vouchers that will explain the whole mystery of this defalcation. The amount originally received for this branch of the revenue; the amount actually paid; and an autograph authority from Lord Tralee himself for, in fact, the appropriation of above fifty thousand pounds of this money for his own sole use: these, sir, are the proofs I have to offer—I should rather say, to sell; for sometimes one may speak plain. You know my terms, my Lord; I shall not alter them. I don't press for your immediate reply; indeed I am in no hurry; for I know you must ultimately accede to my proposal. When shall I call again for your Lordship's answer?"

"To-morrow—this day week," replied the

Earl, with a little—a very little, irritation in his gesture.

"Then, sir, this day week I will have the honour of waiting on you." There was an obsequiousness in the man's manner, as he said this, strangely different from the tone of his previous address. Lord Alton rang for his secretary to conduct him away in the same manner that he had entered, and both the Earl and Lord Calvert felt relieved when the door closed on their mysterious visitor.

CHAPTER III.

A SACRIFICE.

This fellow's of exceeding honesty,
And knows all qualities with a learned spirit
Of human dealings.

OTHELLO.

IT was some minutes before either of the gentlemen gave utterance to their thoughts: at last, Lord Calvert gave expression to his feelings in the abrupt exclamation of "Poor Fitzosborne!"

"Ay,—I *do* pity *him* most sincerely," rejoined Lord Alton:—"this discovery—and at such a moment!"

Lord Calvert's agitation became more perceptible ; but his auditor was engrossed by his own reflections:—after a pause, Lord Calvert continued,—

" You hinted to me, my Lord, that Fitzosborne was paying his addresses to—to Miss Fielding. Do not think me impertinent if I ask you whether she—in short, whether they are accepted ? "

" I cannot exactly say that everything is settled," replied Lord Alton ; " but as I know you are Fitzosborne's friend, and indeed I might say his confidant—for he has almost told me so—I think I may tell you frankly how the matter stands at present. He has, I understand, been for some time attached to her; and, though it is scarcely fair to tell ladies' secrets, I have reason to think the partiality is in some degree mutual. But I understand from Lord Tralee, that out of a very proper delicacy of feeling, Mr. Fitzosborne has deferred making his proposals in form to my niece, until he had received the sanction of her family; indeed, I

suppose the previous misunderstanding which I told you existed between Lord Tralee and myself, made him particularly guarded on this point."

"Then I am to conclude that your Lordship has given your consent to their marriage?"

"Yes; so far as mere consent goes; but of course I referred Lord Tralee to Mr. Fielding: however, Lord Tralee's offers of settlement are, or rather were, so handsome, that I should think there is little doubt of his approbation of them."

"I am afraid this ill-opportune discovery may affect Lord Tralee's power of being generous." And as Lord Calvert said this, he vainly endeavoured to stifle the sigh, which alone betrayed his own emotion.

"I am afraid so too; for if these charges are proved against Lord Tralee, it is impossible to say what may be the consequences."

Lord Calvert was silent for a moment, and then abruptly added, "Then, my Lord, let me enable you to provide a remedy; I meant to tell you how much I feel gratified by the choice

of situation you have condescended to offer me. But now, I will only say, that I thankfully accept the mission to Russia."

"To Russia!—Calvert!—you astonish me!—indeed I am almost disappointed."

"And yet, my Lord, do not think me impertinent in presuming to dictate; but the office I leave vacant, might—save Fitzosborne."

"But, Calvert, it would be such a happiness to me to have had you in such close communication with myself."

"I assure you, my Lord, Fitzosborne is much better qualified to fulfil its duties than I am. He has very decided talents, and is besides not unacquainted with the technicalities of business, of which I am perfectly ignorant."

"You are a zealous friend, Calvert."

"In giving that place to him, your Lordship would be doubly generous. You would not only confer a kindness on the son of your enemy, but you would insure—the happiness of ——"

Lord Calvert was afraid to trust his voice in the conclusion of the sentence. Lord Alton continued:—

"And you, Calvert; why do you prefer Russia?"

"I am determined not to stay in England," answered Lord Calvert, impetuously; and then added, in a calmer tone, "I am always fond of travelling, and you know I once before went to Russia from choice."

"But your family. What will Lady Ellesmere and your sisters say to another absence?"

"I have not spoken on the subject to any of them but Matilda."

"She, then, is your favourite, I perceive," observed Lord Alton, with a smile; "and does Lady Matilda approve your choice?"

"I believe she does; but at all events it is made; and now, my Lord, may I flatter myself that Fitzosborne's appointment is equally determined on?"

"I cannot promise that, Calvert, without consulting the Duke; but I will promise to

further your wishes as far as is in my power; and, perhaps I may some day call upon you to return the compliment 'in promoting mine.'"

Lord Calvert fancied he discovered the latent meaning of Lord Alton's words; but as his Lordship rose, he considered it as a hint that he did not mean to pursue the conversation at that moment; and he therefore put an end to his visit, leaving the Earl more than ever prepossessed in his favour, though far from conscious of the whole extent of his generosity.

As Lord Calvert returned from Lord Alton's apartment into the hall, he met Lady Harriet Moreton and Julia, just preparing to enter the carriage, which was waiting for them. Never did Julia look more lovely; and, as Lord Calvert's speaking eyes were rivetted on her countenance, he seemed to take one long and lingering look of her, whom he felt he had resigned for ever.

"Lady Harriet had been engaged in speaking to a servant, and at first had not perceived him; but now turning to him with her usual

winning smile, she exclaimed, "How provoking, my Lord, that we should just be going out! You see we are not at home!" So saying, she good-humouredly took his arm, to lead her to the carriage; whilst he stammered regrets that his visit should be so ill-timed, though in truth it was never till then contemplated.

"Shall we meet you on Monday at Lady Tralee's?" inquired Lady Harriet, as he was handing Miss Fielding into the carriage. He felt her hand tremble, and he attributed the circumstance to the mention of that name.

"I am afraid not; I have so many engagements that evening," replied Lord Calvert coldly.

"Oh! true.—I forgot that is the Contessa Montalvina's night too."

"Are you to be there? if so, I shall have the pleasure of meeting you." He kissed hands as he said this, and the carriage drove on.

For many minutes, Julia remained totally absorbed in her own sad reflections. It was

certainly foolish of her to give so much weight to Lord Calvert's manners, when his actions appeared so much in contradiction to them; but there was an expression in his countenance, as they had so unexpectedly met in the hall—his look so strongly reminded her of former days, that she was again half tempted to believe she was not totally indifferent to him. But then the words of that horrid letter glared in her memory, and the tears trembled in her eyes, as she mentally exclaimed, "What would I not give to ascertain his sentiments! but, alas! how can I mistake them? has he not himself declared them?"

Whilst Lady Harriet and Julia pursued the usual routine of London drives, Lord Alton prepared to consummate, as he fondly hoped, the happiness of his niece, who had now become possessed of a daughter's share in his affection. He therefore lost no time in communicating to Mr. Fielding the purport of Lord Tralee's conversation, at least so far as related to Fitzosborne.

Having laid before Mr. Fielding the offers of Lord Tralee in regard to settlement, and expressed his own opinion of their liberality, his Lordship thus continued: "It is but fair to add, though under the strictest seal of confidence, that I have reason to think some circumstances of an unpleasant nature are now pending, which, in their result, are likely to be most prejudicial to Lord Tralee, and may ultimately even deprive him of the power of putting into effect his present generous intentions. On the other hand, there is every probability, short of certainty, of Fitzosborne being immediately appointed to a very high official situation, which would be more than equivalent in point of income to the present maintenance offered by Lord Tralee. It is for you, Fielding, to weigh the merits of the son against the errors of the father, if such exist; and above all things, to reflect maturely ere you sacrifice your daughter's happiness on mere mercenary calculations.

"I cannot help alluding to our former conversations on the subject of Julia. I acknowledge

that the more I know of Lord Calvert, the more I esteem and even admire him; and I own *I* should have infinitely preferred that connexion to all others: but unfortunately, my dear Fielding, we cannot always control the minds of others. Lady Harriet tells me she is convinced that Julia is attached to Mr. Fitzosborne; and I can only say, that when two equally honourable situations were lately offered to Lord Calvert's option, he accepted one that takes him out of England, in preference to an employment at home: this is to me a convincing proof, if any were wanting, that his inclinations do not lie in England. However, as his appointment is not yet publicly announced, I request you will not give the slightest intimation of it to any person whatever.

"And now, Fielding, I have but one more observation to make. You will be surprised at the expression with which I began this letter, requesting you not to lose unnecessary time in deciding on this subject—my motives are twofold: first, as relating to the situation in which Lord Tralee is at present, and which ere long must

come to an issue; and the second reason relates to my own private views. I have at length seen a woman whose tastes and principles are accordant with my own: I am sorry to say she is many years younger than I am; but if she can forgive the disparity in age, I am perfectly convinced that in her society I should at last find that domestic happiness in the vain pursuit of which I have hitherto passed my life. It would be, I own, a satisfaction to me to feel assured that our dear Julia's happiness was placed beyond the reach of chance, or influenced by any circumstance contingent on my marrying again, should that event ever happen. I have always considered her as another daughter; and now I feel my affection fully sanctions that tie. Should, therefore, her marriage with Fitzosborne take place, you will not I trust object to my giving her that memorandum of my affection which I had always destined as her marriage-present: yet let me add, that (from a peculiarity I own) I should like to have an opportunity of offering that gift to her, before any other person

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could claim even the shadow of a right to the disposal of my fortune.

"And now, Fielding, farewell: I rely on seeing you here without delay; and am particularly anxious you should arrive before this day week."

For a few days after this letter was dispatched, Lady Harriet's engagements were so numerous, that the unconscious Julia only saw Lord Alton at dinner; but whenever they did meet, he received her with the smile of gratified benevolence irradiating his countenance, as he reflected on that step, which, alas! had sealed poor Julia's doom. On the day fixed for the ball at Lady Tralee's, some gentlemen were of Lord Alton's dinner party; and as Lady Harriet was leaving the dining-room, one of the party inquired whether she was going to Lady Tralee's? To Julia's infinite astonishment, she replied in the negative: alleging a slight cold as an excuse for not accepting her invitation, as she thought it likely it would be a late ball.

"I am sorry you don't go, Harriet," said

Lord Alton, "as I sent my excuse last week. And Julia, what do you say to this arrangement?"

"Oh!" replied Lady Harriet promptly, "Julia goes with Lady Ellesmere;" and so saying, the two ladies left the room. Julia felt surprised, if not indignant, at her engagements having been thus pre-arranged without her acquiescence, or even her knowledge; but Lady Harriet anticipated her remonstrances.

"Now, don't look so angry, *ma belle;* it is quite impossible I could go to the Tralees. I have hitherto managed admirably to keep them at arm's-length; but if I was to go to their ball to-night, I should be condemned to the infliction of an *embrassade* for ever."

"And why should I go, if you don't?" innocently inquired Julia.

"Well, I declare, Miss Fielding, you sometimes almost provoke me. How long is this farce to continue?—When may I be permitted to know what all the world have been talking of these three months?"

"If your Ladyship will condescend to explain."

"Then, in point-blank English, how soon am I to give you joy?—How soon are you to be married to Fitzosborne?"

"I married to Fitzosborne!—Never!"

"Never!—Why can you pretend to deny his having proposed for you?"

"Mr. Fitzosborne's professions are—"

"Ay, Julia, let *me* tell you what they are—they are like the softest whispers of the siren, that would entice you to the precipice, and smile on your destruction."

"Whatever I may think of Mr. Fitzosborne's professions to me, he cannot doubt of my sentiments towards him."

"No, poor girl! your dancing with him—your flirting with him—your talking to him, are sufficient indications of your sentiments."

"Why, Lady Harriet, will you believe me upon my honour, when I tell you I am perfectly indifferent to him?"

"No, no, Julia, you may love him as—you

may hate him as I do now; but *indifferent!* no woman can be indifferent to Lionel Fitzosborne."

"I assure you, as solemnly as it is in my power to do, that however I may be flattered by Mr. Fitzosborne's professions of regard, I never have returned them."

"Nay, nay—*c'est un peu fort*—you may make me your confidant or not; but you never need attempt to contradict the evidence of my own eyes and ears. Mr. Fitzosborne has paid his addresses to you as publicly as it was possible to do: your acceptance of them has been no less public. If you were to recede now, you would either expose yourself or him to censure. And what censure does he deserve, at least from you?—Is he not handsome—accomplished—talented—fashionable—heir to a title and to a large fortune?"

Julia gave an unwilling assent to all these praises—she could not deny them; and yet her heart shrunk from their acknowledgment. Lady Harriet continued—

"Nothing that I can see should deter you from a match that every other girl would covet; unless, perhaps, some *liaison de cœur*."

"Oh! no—no!" hastily exclaimed Julia, "I have no preference for any other."

"Then, my dear Miss Fielding, the sooner you make up your mind to marry Mr. Fitzosborne the better;" and her Ladyship hummed a tune, as if to turn the conversation.

"I think I will not go to Lady Tralee's to-night," said Julia, after a silence of some minutes.

"You will bring me into a terrible scrape with Lady Ellesmere then," replied Lady Harriet.

"But why, Lady Harriet, did you fix with her without consulting me?"

"I knew how much you liked to be with the Ellesmeres; and I had a shrewd suspicion that you did not much fancy the Countess Montalvina. But, hark! I hear the gentlemen on the stairs:—we must go to dress. Lady Ellesmere is to call for you at eleven. My father will be

so angry if you disappoint her and Lady Tralee too. If I can get away in time from the Ambassador's, I will join you at Lady Tralee's." So saying, Lady Harriet turned out of one door, as Julia left the room by another.

"I am afraid," thought Julia, "I have done wrong, in not telling my father about Mr. Fitzosborne at the rectory. Certainly there is some truth in what Lady Harriet says; and, after all, what can I now do better than marry this man, or any other that asks me? I have been too happy at the rectory, ever to return there again. Ah! no; I will never see Ellesmere again. And then, what does it signify what becomes of me; it may not be for long." And mournfully, as listlessly, she turned to the task of preparing for another joyless scene of London splendour.

Lady Harriet's reflections were on the same theme, but of a different cast. She had long discovered Fitzosborne's attachment to Julia; and even her preference of Lord Calvert had not escaped her penetration. Had Julia really

loved Fitzosborne, Lady Harriet, in all probability, would have prevented, or at least not promoted their marriage, from those scarcely-repressed feelings of malice and envy which now induced her to take the opposite course.—"That woman, whom he has preferred to me; that Julia, whom, with fond idolatry, he now believes perfection, if she becomes his wife, I shall be revenged. With what deep-laid policy did he endeavour to persuade me, that he merely paid his addresses to this girl in compliance with the wishes of his family! How did he more than insinuate, that his visits here were addressed as much to me as to her! He has betrayed his friend; but Julia still loves Lord Calvert; and Lionel may yet be taught the tortures of jealousy, and the force of woman's hate!"

Such were the reflections that accompanied Lady Harriet to her toilet; where, skilled in "all the arts of female lore," she repaired her smiles, and gave new lustre to her brilliant charms. Then, proudly conscious of her own

powers, she gaily tripped into her carriage, as the lights from that of Lady Ellesmere turned out of the court, whilst it bore the agitated Julia towards Portman Square.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BALL.

Within, 'twas brilliant all and light,
A thronging scene of figures bright,
It glow'd on Ellen's dazzled sight;
As when the setting sun has given
Ten thousand hues to summer even;
And from their tissue, fancy frames
Aerial knights, and fairy dames.

LADY OF THE LAKE.

AMONGST all the crowds that nightly haunt the various scenes of gaiety in London, how few individuals there are who could in honest truth assert that they are happy! Perhaps the lively, innocent girl, that stands tip-toe on

the threshold of pleasure; who believes that every smile denotes joy, and every sound indicates hilarity; who sees in the lights, and the garlands, and the splendour of festivity, the realization of her own day-dreams; even she derives her momentary transport from the delusive brilliancy of hope: let her but pass the fairy portal—let her tread on the floor where roses seem to court her presence, and she finds too soon the flowers vanish. Disappointment succeeds to hope; fatigue and satiety take place of enjoyment; she learns to smile or laugh, like those she sees around her; but the tranquil charm of contentment is gone. Other wishes—other objects appear to lure her again to a sickly interest—a waning hope. If these views are lost, disgust returns with accumulated force; if they are gained, the chances are that their attainment is but a prelude to the abandonment of the very scenes which once appeared the utmost horizon of happiness, beyond which there was nothing to pursue. Would that an Asmodeus could be found to

raise those vaulted roofs that now seem to echo with the songs of revelry! How many sighs would then ascend to heaven, that now are lost amongst the shouts of merriment! or rather, would that Ithuriel's spear could touch the breasts of those who nightly fill those costly banquet-rooms; and that in revealing their inmost feelings, one might be found to contradict this saddening lesson of the world's falsity.

What pen can describe the various feelings of the different votaries of pleasure, who gradually congregated together at Lady Tralee's! All intent on one pursuit—all following it in opposite directions!—the ladies of the mansion, far from being exempted from the universal penalty of anxiety, concealing a more than common share under increasing smiles and animated countenances.

First came all the horrors of preparation; as lighting lamps, chalking floors, and ordering supper. Such housewifely cares were far beneath the attention of the fine Lady Tralee. She had heard that the Duchess of Durham

had, on the occasion of Miss Green's marriage, paid Mr. Gunter several hundred pounds for taking that trouble off her Grace; and Lady Tralee boasted that she had this night agreed with him for about double the sum. She left the music to Colinet, and the constables to Townshend. But still some little anxieties remained, for which there was no proxy. The cart of evergreens did not arrive from Elm Park till many hours after her Ladyship had given them up in despair. In lighting one of the lustres, her best new satin sofa had been entirely ruined; and one of the awkward supernumeraries had thrown down her favourite china vase, as he was carefully dusting the last of the music-stands. But *il y a remède pour tout;* and, finally, Lady Tralee sauntered through her rooms in splendid solitude; now fearing they would be too hot—then shivering with the cold, and ordering canal coal—then hoping Lionel would come early—then fearing her daughters would never be dressed in time; and, finally, yawning loud and long, as her usual bed-time approached, and no guest appeared.

The young ladies, too, had their little private solicitudes—their new gowns did not exactly fit—the hair-dresser came late—Maria's white gloves tore all across the back of the hand; and Miss Jenny fancied that the tremulous sweet-pea that grew out of the top of her head made her look too tall—*coques et nœuds d'Apollon* were alternately adopted: nor would the anxious debate have ever terminated, had it not been for the judicious flattery of her Abigail, who, herself impatient to join, in her own circle, the festive scene, declared she had never seen Miss Jenny look half so handsome.

Lastly, Lord Tralee made his entrance; but it was at a most inauspicious moment, for his fair lady was just undergoing the agonies of repeated refusals. Single raps of ominous import succeeded each other in rapid succession. A general epidemic seemed to have seized the *beau monde en masse.* The large china basket appointed to receive these missiles, for the purpose of proving to those who came "the fair horizon that lay still beyond," in the

sphere of Lady Tralee's visiting list, now bore heaps upon heaps, till it was full to overflowing; and as Lady Tralee tossed in note after note, each sibyl's leaf fell heavy on her Lord's conscience-stricken heart; and whilst he accused the world of premature desertion, as the accumulated mass swelled in his view, he strode up and down the room in increasing dignity, moroseness, and abstraction.

But Lady Tralee was ignorant of her husband's griefs, and always indifferent to any demonstration of them. She had left parents, country, friends, to follow his destiny; not because she loved him, but because he was even then superior to that class in which hitherto she had lived, and moved, and had her being. She had climbed with him the slippery ascent which had now raised them on an eminence, even above her own imaginings; but in their progress from poverty to wealth, from obscurity to rank, they had never once paused to look back on those homely, yet kindly friends, who in humbler days had sheltered them with unrequited cordiality: in con-

sequence, they had been by those very friends in turn abused, despised, and, finally, almost forgotten: however, still there were enough left to envy them their transient day of splendour; and after all, envy is the garland we all delight to appropriate, even though our temples throb beneath the iron crown, round which the wreath is woven.

"How magnificent this house is!" exclaimed Anna Weldon, as she gaily followed her mother and sister up the brilliantly-lighted staircase. Well-dressed gentlemen, out of livery, leaned over the banisters at each landing-place, to pass from mouth to mouth their names and titles; whilst servants of the second rank, loaded with tags and bouquets, crowded the hall, to make audible observations on the ladies' dresses.

"This is decidedly the handsomest house we have been in yet," observed Miss Weldon, as she settled her *blonde*, and pulled out the *bouffante* sleeves that her shawl had somewhat impaired.

"How I should like to live in London!

How I do envy any person who can give such a ball as this!" rejoined the fair Anna; and if Lady Tralee had heard the observation, it would have amply repaid her for all her solicitudes.

By degrees, the company came dropping in. The young ladies, who were not, like Anna Weldon, new to every thing, and therefore pleased with every thing, looked cold and sulky, as they perceived they were amongst the first arrivals: for it is an awful thing to be the first at a ball. The three Ladies Mortmain, wrapped up in red shawls, stood whispering together, as they surveyed the Miss Weldons, whom they did not know, and listened to Miss Jenny Fitzosborne, whom they seldom recognised except at Lady Tralee's. Then it always happens in these cases, that the very people arrive together whom you least wish should come in contact with each other. If you have a particularly ugly old maid, a vulgar talkative widow, or an enormously rich and fat city-heiress on your list, you may always calculate

on their sitting on the same couch, or standing directly *vis-à-vis* to the most fastidious west-end acquaintance you can boast of: and besides, however you may exclude these persons from your daily state, it only makes them prize their annual admission to your drawing-room proportionably more; and in order to show off at your expense, they affect a degree of familiarity with you before your guests, which is appended to you for ever, like the national debt.

Lady Tralee always boasted of having refined her visiting list with the greatest care; but still, after all her trouble and filtering, some dregs remained: perchance there are not three exclusives in London that have not similar grievances to complain of, either in the shape of a country cousin; or a county elector; or a rich old aunt; or a vulgar elder brother; or, worse than all, a foolish, vain, but relentless creditor.

On this occasion, the amiable and unoffending Mrs. Branton acted the part of tormentor,

as she sailed into the room, smiling and curtseying, and looking most rustically good-humoured: "had the pleasure to tell the ladies, Mrs. Smith was rather better; saw her at the repository on Wednesday—Miss Betsy's grown quite handsome—hoped she was not late; but only came to town that morning, on purpose to attend her Ladyship's kind invitation—was too late for the stage, and had to come all the way in a chaise."

"My dear Mrs. Branton, have you seen your friend Lady Hauteville since you came?" inquired Lady Tralee, in a voice sufficiently audible, to redeem, as she hoped, Mrs. Branton's yellow—

"Yes, indeed; I called on her on my way to my lodgings, and they were good enough to ask me to stay dinner; but I had ordered my mutton chops and—"

Lady Tralee turned away in despair: Lord Tralee attempted to divert the attention of the Ladies Mortmain; but it was too late. "Who is that person, in the little blue turban, that is

flatter behind than before, as if it had been caught in a trap?" inquired the eldest.

"A very charming neighbour of ours in the country, Mrs. Branton by name: her husband is immensely rich, I am told; but she always travels independently."

"Oh! I understand; she is a character—a blue-stocking, I suppose, patronised by Lady Hauteville."

"Exactly: your Ladyship's discrimination is superexcellent. How do you do, Sir William Mathison?—Have you had good singing to-night at the Opera?" And Lord Tralee was glad to make his escape, leaving poor, simple-hearted Mrs. Branton under the protection of the Ladies Mortmain's discernment, and Lady Hauteville's love of blue-stockings.

"I am afraid, Lady Weldon, you will be cold; pray sit here. I beg you a thousand pardons, Miss Whitmore, I hope I don't disturb you." So saying, Miss Fitzosborne dexterously displaced her quondam friend from the most conspicuous seat in the room, in the

vain hope that she would deposit her preposterous goose-down tippet in some less ostentatious corner. But, by degrees, the pleasing bustle increased: double raps now succeeded to the minute-guns of disappointment, which had been their precursor. The names came so rapidly on each other, that it baffled the articulation even of Mr. Syllabus; and almost in an instant the outer room filled. Lady Tralee changed her station from the side of the fire-place, progressively to the middle of the carpet—then near the door—then to the anti-room—lastly, to the upper landing-place; whilst, in the very opposite direction, the tide of company rolled onwards, till even the farthest ball-room became crowded.

"I wonder, Miss Fitzosborne, you have not more officers at these London balls: I think red coats are so enlivening," observed Miss Weldon.

"I fancy some of those gentlemen *are* officers; but none but the Guards, as officers on duty, I believe, wear their uniforms in town."

"Do you know Captain Brisbane, of the sixtieth dragoons?" inquired Anna Weldon, looking as unconscious as she could.

"Yes—no—I really forget—we know so many dragoons."

"Captain Brisbane is a very handsome man: large eyes—black stock. I wonder you don't know him."

"You don't mean that gentleman yonder, in the blue coat?—that is Mr. Jessop, of the same regiment."

"Lord! so it is.—Well, I declare I hardly knew him. I suppose Major Crosbie will be here of course, since you ask Mr. Jessop. Crosbie is first major, and Mr. Jessop is only a cornet:" and Miss Weldon looked very pompous, at the thought of her cavalier's superiority.

"Mr. Jessop is here in quality of being Lord Westrop's son—not on the strength of his commission," said Miss Fitzosborne; who, horrified at the ignorance betrayed by her new acquaintance, meditated an immediate escape,

when she perceived Mr. Jessop himself approaching the door against which she leaned, "with all his blushing honours full upon him." Each pair of eyes, which the three young ladies possessed, were fixed upon the knight-errant; and perchance each heart whispered that he intended to ask its fair owner to dance; but the redoubtable beau advanced in silence. His head (and it looked particularly black and glossy) passed slowly from the left to the right, in an angle of forty-five degrees, in return for Miss Fitzosborne's gracious recognizance; again, with equal deliberation, it crossed towards the left, in a sweeping salutation of both the Misses Weldon in one bow; and finally, the taciturn dragoon took up a position beside Lady Weldon, leaning, with inimitable listlessness, against the same door-post that sustained the weight of her corpulent Ladyship.

"He is not going to ask mamma to dance, I hope!" whispered Anna to her sister, tittering.

But Mr. Jessop himself only thought of being asked—to dinner.

"Have you seen the Ellesmeres lately?" was the first sentence which he summoned resolution to utter.

"I have not seen them for above a fortnight. We don't meet so often in town, you know, as in the country," replied Lady Weldon, not at all aware how common-place her observation was.

"Is it true that Lady Louisa is going to be married?" said Mr. Jessop, as he nodded familiarly to Miss Flinn.

"Dear me! who to?" inquired both Anna Weldon and Miss Fitzosborne at the same time.

"'Pon my honour I forget.—I rather think to Russel."

"Well, it is astonishing to me how those Lady Calverts have got on," remarked Miss Fitzosborne, in a tone of petulance. "I suppose Lady Harriet Moreton is the person who has done it all for them."

"Did you see them at the Duchess of Dur-

ham's the other night?" inquired Lady Weldon, with a lack-a-daysical intonation; "I saw their names in the Morning Post." But before Miss Fitzosborne could reply to this interesting query, she perceived Lady Coleraine at some distance beckoning to her.

"My dear soul, who *are* you talking to?" hastily demanded the Marchioness.—"Are those Lady Harriet Moreton's importations from the country?"

"Lady Harriet Moreton's *friends* certainly, —Lady Weldon and her daughters.—Shall I present them to your Ladyship?"

"Oh! for heaven's sake do not think of such a thing!—I knew them by name long ago—and really they are very respectable-looking—much better than I expected—*tant soit peu naïves apparemment, mais cela passera.*"

Miss Fitzosborne bit her lips with vexation at having been seen talking to people from the country; but she consoled herself by determining not to go near them for the rest of the evening. She curtsied to Miss Flinn, as

if to turn the conversation, whilst Lady Coleraine continued—"What is become of your brother?—I have not seen him yet. I suppose he is engaged with his love-making.—Oh! I declare they are all come in.—I see Lady Ellesmere and Lady Matilda; and Mr. Russel in high attendance on Lady Louisa; and your brother, of course, with Miss Fielding.—She looks really very beautiful to-night—those amethysts are always so becoming."

"She is not a beauty of mine, I own," observed Miss Flinn, as she glanced at Sir William, who merely looked wise, and bowed, not venturing a contradiction.

"Certainly, Miss Flinn," replied her Ladyship, tartly, "Miss Fielding's beauty is not yours; but," added she, recollecting herself, "I don't see Oporto here; so pray, Miss Flinn, don't wait for him. Sir William, won't you prevail on her to dance with you?—see, they have begun in the next room."

"Your Ladyship is too good-natured," and the happy baronet gaily led off his prize.

"I wish you would provide me with a good heiress," observed Mr. Jessop, who had witnessed her Ladyship's last manœuvre.

"I must take care of Oporto first," rejoined she, laughing, and resuming her good-natured half lisp. "Suppose you both draw lots for Lady Charlotte Hargrove; there she is, just come in."

"That would make her Lot's wife; eh, Jessop?" and it was scarcely necessary to turn round in order to ascertain that the punster was Lord Coleraine.

"Now don't say anything about getting into a pickle, Jessop, if you love me," retorted the Marchioness, as she moved onwards. "How do, Lady Hauteville? How are all the babes? So I see you have brought Miss Mortimer; how very good-natured! I never take more than one at a time. If I had two girls at once under my wing, I should fancy myself like a boiled fowl."

"Lady Tralee begged of me to bring Miss

Mortimer, in hopes of getting in with the Duchess of Chester," whispered Lady Hauteville.

"It won't do," replied Lady Coleraine, laughing. "But where is Hauteville? I have not seen him yet, to ask his support to a plan I have in contemplation."

"Pray keep it there, my dear Lady Mother, or you will frighten all London with your plans and prospects," observed Lord Oporto, who just then strolled towards them.

"Have you been dancing, Oporto?" inquired the Duke of Durham.

"Yes, with that lovely girl Miss Fielding; she is devilish handsome, 'faith."

"How did you manage to get rid of Fitzosborne? I thought he monopolised her entirely."

"I got the start of him by half a neck; but I suppose he is making up for his lost time, for I left them talking together at the window."

"Well, I wish it was over. I think nothing is such a bore as to witness a regular flirtation that every body knows the end of."

"Like a serpentine walk in some tea-garden," rejoined Lady Coleraine.

"Or a sham fight," observed Mr. Jessop.

"Bon!" rejoined Lord Oporto; "cela sent le metier."

"Ah! Miladi; je suis enchantée de vous voir; et vous, Milord: avez-vous assisté à l'opéra ce soir?"

"*Ma belle* Madame Hervey, you must speak English; 'tis too bad, upon my word, that you oblige us all to jabber French, and that you will not learn our language; is it not so, my Lord?" said Lady Hauteville to the veteran Lord Shawe, who was, as usual, not far distant from Madame Hervey.

"Ah! no. I can do no such a ting; allons, j'ai fait l'impossible; mais voilà cette bonne dame, cette Madame Bas-ton; ah! il faut que je me sauve; car assurément elle ne me passera pas un seul point sur le chapitre de son Mont

de Piété," and Madame Hervey disappeared as rapidly as she uttered.

"I hope, Lord Shawe, this room is warm enough," inquired Miss Mortimer, squeezing herself from behind Lady Hauteville, where she had hitherto remained unnoticed by his Lordship. A gratified bow rewarded her delicate little attention; and the General deliberately moved towards her, as if intending to keep up a conversation, as soon as he had laid in a sufficient stock of ideas.

"My dear Duchess, I have been looking for you all the evening," said Lady Coleraine. "Do you see that fat woman next the third window, looking round as if she had just dropped down from heaven, with diamonds on her head, before and behind? That is Lady Weldon; and that fat pretty girl beside her is one of her daughters."

"Oh! I see they are just what Lady Harriet described them to be, the very personification of fashion-hunters," replied her Grace of Durham. "But, my dear Marchioness, I

really could not undertake them, unless I was quite sure of making the dough rise. Are they very rich?"

"Oh! I fancy so; they have a deer-park, and all that sort of thing, in the country."

"Well, that would do pretty well in summer; and they have good horses and carriages already set up?"

"O yes. The only *embarras* is, that she has a house and a husband—and both are in town."

"Well, I am sure, my dear Lady Coleraine, I am exceedingly obliged to you for the hint: I will speak to Lady Harriet again about them. But, *à propos*, I don't see her here to-night."

"Why, one could scarcely expect that she should be present at this ball; for I fancy this is a sort of *dénouement* to Fitzosborne's *petite comédie* with her Ladyship's cousin."

"He will stand in a new relationship to her certainly: they say Lord Alton, in a great measure, has made this match."

"Indeed! Well, I always knew him to be very clever; and there is Russel, too, he looks very much as if he had his head in the noose, ready for hanging."

"I am much mistaken if Russel is easily caught. At one time, I was quite certain he would have proposed for Miss Green; but, somehow or other, I never could bring him to a point."

Whilst these experienced dowagers were thus engaged in canvassing the affairs and prospects of those around them, the objects of their animadversions were, generally, unconscious of even the grounds on which such various speculations were erected. Lady Weldon, for instance, did not know the Duchess of Durham by sight; nor had she any idea of the necessity which exists in London, that all candidates for admission into the mysteries of *ton* should have what Lady Harriet Moreton not inaptly designated sponsors. She believed (poor ignorant woman!) that because Sir James was of a very respectable family in the

county of ——; that because she had brought him a fortune, which, probably, was treble the amount of that which half the fine ladies in London could boast; and because her daughters were tolerably well-looking, moderately well accomplished, and decidedly entitled to independent fortunes; that they all had as good a right to be received into the first circles in London, as the two Countesses, who were daughters of an apothecary; or as the one who had herself been a governess; or even as the Marchioness of Coleraine, whose husband lived on a weekly allowance from his creditors. It is true, nothing could more decidedly prove Lady Weldon's total ignorance, than this most erroneous supposition. But the greater was the necessity for a proper corrective. This was precisely what Lady Harriet Moreton had kindly undertaken to provide—*à son insu;* not exactly from disinterested friendship for Lady Weldon, but from a combination of two equally powerful motives:—the first, an incipient love of interference in the affairs of others, which is a dis-

ease very prevalent with clever people; and, secondly, an intention of being useful to the Duchess of Durham; on a calculation of the kindness being, at a future day, repaid with interest. For the broad, purple, good-natured Duchess, was one of the many impoverished Dowagers of quality, who, having in their husband's life-time enjoyed their full share of his improvident extravagance, suffer in their widowhood the *peine forte et dure* of a limited jointure; and being too old to write novels, or to prove the efficacy of any other modern experiments in the art of notoriety, her Grace was reduced to follow the lucrative trade of chaperoning, and even occasionally to have recourse to the less certain speculations of the loo-table.

But, as has been observed before, Lady Weldon looked on the scene at Lady Tralee's with unmixed satisfaction, totally unconscious there was any *dessous des cartes*. She found herself in a society infinitely superior to any she had ever before been admitted to; though

how she got there, was a surprise even to herself: finally, however, attributing her unexpected good fortune to the combined merits of herself, her daughters, and her house in Lower Grosvenor Street, she enjoyed the splendid festival as much, if not more, than any of the *élite* of the company; and in the interval of "solitude," in Lord Byron's acceptation of the term, she composed a letter to Mrs. Masham in the country, which, when written, would read out at least as well as any that lady had ever received either from her sister, or the bishop himself.

"How do you do, my dear Lady Ellesmere?" said Lady Weldon, as the latter passed her: for her unusual happiness made her less nervous, less jealous, and less taciturn than ordinary. "I have been looking every where for you, as I wanted to wish you joy."

"Joy! my dear Lady Weldon!—of what?"

"Oh! Lady Louisa, I hear, is going to be married immediately to Mr. Russel."

"I assure you, Lady Weldon, *I* know no-

thing about it; and I shall be very much obliged if you will contradict the report, on my authority."

"Well, I assure you, Lady Ellesmere, I thought it would have given you a great deal of pleasure; I am sure I should be delighted if you could return the compliment to me on either of my daughters going to be married; though, to be sure, they are so very young: Anna will be only eighteen next May."

Lady Ellesmere recollected having heard that observation repeated successively for the last three years. But she never commented on the follies of her friends. And, in herself too proud to suppose that any change of place could affect those whom she had once honoured by that distinction, she looked upon Lady Weldon (strange to say) exactly the same when they met in London, as she did formerly when they encountered each other in the parish church of Fairton.

In the mean time, Julia Fielding had been infinitely happier than she had dared to antici-

pate. How strangely, almost indescribably, inconsistent is the human heart! In the commencement of this very evening, she had positively declared to Lady Harriet Moreton, her determination never to marry Fitzosborne. Before she was half dressed, she had made up her mind almost to the very contrary. And during the whole ball, she had received his most decided attentions with a careless indifference, that might have appeared a confirmation of either resolve.

What was the solution of this enigma? Was it that with the vivacity congenial to her age, still more than to her character, she had been exhilarated by the gay and festive scene around her? or, that with the vanity which is said to be characteristic of her sex, she had felt gratified and animated by the almost universal homage which had been rendered to her? It would be unnatural to suppose that these causes had not contributed to raise her spirits. But there was yet another cause, which, in gratifying the finest feelings of her heart, gave addi-

tional zest to these pleasures—she had come to Lady Tralee's with her dear Lady Ellesmere, and the beloved companions of her youth. Emancipated from the thraldom, which, though almost unconfessed, was still never suspended in her intercourse with Lady Harriet, she again felt that even casual association with the guardians of her youth was a solace for every care. She had entered the carriage, grave, almost dispirited; but scarcely was she seated, when Lady Louisa threw her arms round her neck, and kissing both cheeks affectionately, exclaimed, in a tone of joy—"At last, dearest Julia, we have you once more all to ourselves!" The warmth with which Julia returned the embrace—the *naïveté* with which she transferred it to her dearest Lady Ellesmere, and the cordiality with which her looks appealed to Lady Matilda—all this, though brief and silent, at once struck on the heart of that too anxious friend. "Dear—dear girl," thought she, "how unjust have I been to thee! What right have I to interfere in the choice of

thine own heart? or what fault can I justly accuse thee of having committed?"

Lady Harriet had seen the lights of Lady Ellesmere's carriage pass out of the gates as she stepped into her own, which was to convey her to the ambassador's; and before the bearings on her hammercloth came in turn under the lamp in the gateway, a compact of renewed affection had been ratified in each happy heart. It was, as Lady Louisa said, so long since they had been alone together—it was so like old times.

"I wish now we were all returning to Ellesmere," said the Countess: her happy auditors joined in the kindly sentiment that dictated the wish; though all, from different motives at the moment, dissented from the precise expression of it. However, Julia thought only how glad she was to find herself again in the large old coach, whose very leathern cushions she fancied a regard for; and if a transient thought wandered towards Lord Calvert, it was but to feel pleasure, rather than regret,

that he was not present to throw, by the inconsistency of his manners, a gloom upon the sun-shine of such pure and hallowed friendship.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

I feel like one
That's left alone,
In banquet-hall deserted;
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but him departed.

OLD SONG.

FITZOSBORNE, contrary to his usual custom, remained at his father's till the conclusion of the ball. He had seen Julia to Lady Harriet Moreton's carriage, who had called to convey her home at an hour comparatively early, although not for some time after Lady Ellesmere

had left her; and Lionel had not only returned into the now emptying drawing-rooms, but had even danced that last expiring dance which closes all such festive scenes, and, with a sort of melancholy gaiety, sounds the knell of parting pleasure, to warn the tired and harassed votaries of dissipation that their revels now are ended.

Bodily exertion seemed necessary, as the expression of Fitzosborne's happiness: for Julia had conditionally promised to be his bride, at least so he translated the timid reference to her father, which she had scarcely articulated, as he handed her down stairs. He had now nearly gained the summit of his proudest hopes. But his joy was not the frank and genuine ebullition of honest contentment; it was rather the proud, cold, almost vindictive triumph of successful talent. Had Lord Calvert been thus fortunate—thus rewarded, he would have looked round him for objects on whom to shower the overflowings of benevolence: for to make others participate in

his happiness, would have been but to perpetuate it. Not so Fitzosborne: he paused, with supercilious pride, to think who would be most mortified at his success. He scarcely even thought of Julia's self, as he mentally recapitulated all her high connexions and splendid expectations: nor would he even have loved her as he did, if the mortification of Lady Harriet Moreton, and the rivalry of Lord Calvert, had not even added stimulus to his passions.

And yet, if it was in Lionel's nature to feel one genuine sentiment, unprofaned by hypocrisy, and uncontaminated by ambition, that sentiment might have been his love for Julia Fielding. She was all that ever his youthful fancy had delineated as perfection in beauty and in grace. His judgment, if not his principles, bore testimony to her virtues; and the cultivation of his own taste taught him justly to appreciate her accomplishments: yet more, if anything had been wanting to make his admiration of Julia an ungovernable, omnipotent

passion, it was those very obstacles to success, which at first seemed insurmountable, and at last served only to increase his triumph.

As he parted from his father, almost the last of the numberless guests, he shook his hand with a cordiality that seldom marked his intercourse with his parent, and in a few words told him what had passed between him and Miss Fielding, and the grounds on which he considered success as certain. "To-morrow," said he, "I will speak to her more explicitly; and to-morrow, you will call me one of the happiest of men."

"And from this night," thought Lord Tralee, as Lionel turned from him; "from this night I may defy the frowns of fortune:—so nearly allied to Lord Alton, who dare henceforward to impugn my conduct, or to suspect my honour?"

It was a bright morning, as the gay and happy Lionel darted rapidly down the uncounted staircase to the hall. At the steps of the door, a little group, consisting of a man and

woman and a child, might have attracted his attention, but that he considered them merely as some of the listless crowd that loiter round the mansions of the great; as if it were

> "pleasant from the loop-holes of retreat
> To gaze at such a world."

They were not beggars; and if they had been, he was too much engrossed by his own happiness to spare a thought for the miseries of others. Scarcely seeming to rest on the ground on which he trod, he sprang down the steps beside them. The freshest breeze of spring played mildly on his fevered cheek, and, wooed by its softness, he ran, rather than walked, round the perfumed square: the flowers were sweet, as they bent beneath their weights of dew; and the early gardeners were just mowing the young grass, as if to increase the freshness. At last, almost exhausted by his own emotions, he returned to his lodgings, whistling as he went; not for want of thought, but in recollection of Colinet's octave flute, and

his last quadrilles; and then threw himself on his bed—if not to sleep, at least to doze away the hours, and dream of Julia.

At length mid-day was passed, and he rose to the sober certainty of waking bliss. His toilet was, if not careless, assuredly not tedious; and throwing on his flowered dressing-gown and Turkish slippers, he ordered his coffee into the drawing-room, into which he was just entering, when, starting back, he hastily said to his servant, "who the devil is that man, walking about there?"

"Sir," replied the valet, with a contemptuous smile, "I suppose he is some bankrupt tailor, or other dun, for he has been waiting here these three hours; and I verily believe he slept on my Lord's steps, for I saw him there late and early."

"Go, and ask the impertinent scoundrel what he wants, and desire him to leave the drawing-room."

The servant obeyed; but in a few minutes returned, with a still broader grin, declaring

that the man refused to leave the room till he had seen his master; adding, "I asked him his name, Sir, and all his answer was, 'Barney;'" and the vivacious valet turned away to conceal his laughter.

"Barney!" exclaimed Lionel, "curse the fellow, what has brought him to London?" And then striding past his servant, he accosted the stranger with a smile, "Why Barney, my good fellow, what brought you here?—I am glad to see you;" but the vehemence with which he slammed the door was not in accordance with the softness of his voice.

"Why, plase yer honour, I'm come up partly on a trifle of business of my own, and partly just to see your honour, long life to ye."

"And how is nurse, M'Clane?—How is Judy, Barney?"

"'Faith, and she's in a poor way, your honour, fretting the life out of her; and, your honour, may I just make so bould, your honour, as to ask after Miss Nancy?"

As the worthy Mr. M'Clane made this

inquiry, he struck his never-failing blackthorn firm on the ground with one muscular hand, whilst the other held his hat in the attitude of obsequiousness; but the erect posture of his tall commanding figure, and the sinister expression of his eyes, as they leered from beneath his shaggy brows, contradicted the humility of his address, and gave indication of independence, if not of absolute hostility.

"Judy is sick, is she?—dear me, I am very sorry," said Fitzosborne, in a careless tone, as he poured his coffee out of its massive urn. —"Well, when you go back, Barney, you must take her a present from me to console her—I'll send her a new gown."

"Troth, your honour, and it's Judy will be proud to wear it, in remembrance of your honour, barring it's not a winding-sheet she'll be after wearing; and all on account of the loss of Miss Nancy, your honour, as I may say."

"Oh, don't be dispirited, Barney," replied Lionel, still keeping as steady in the course of

his own conversation, as Barney did in his: "I dare say Judy will come round in the summer. You may tell her I have some notion of going over to Ballyfoyle in a few months."

"Well, then, bad luck to me, if I hadn't rather than my hat full of money, that either yez never come there, or never go from it; for any ways it's a weary day among us any how."

"Well, Barney, I am sorry to hear things are not going on so well there; but as you know I never interfere with my father's affairs—"

"But is it not yer own honour, dear, that I am after? and the gossoon of a boy, grown as brave a little fellow as your eyes ever looked upon, and the very moral of his grandfather."

"Oh! ay, by the bye, I forgot to ask for him. Do you send him to school now, Barney?"

"Is it to school, your honour? when there isn't one within ten miles of us, barring Father Murphy's, next door."

"And what is to prevent his going there, if it's only next door? You know, I told you

before I would pay for his schooling: let me see, how much is it?—half-a-crown a quarter, if I recollect right."*

"Well then, long life to your honour: for it's yourself that was always considerate," replied Barney, with a leer; "but it's not I that would do the likes to send your honour's son to school without shoes, or breeches itself by times, God help him."

"But you know, Barney, I've often told you if you ever mention that the boy *is* my son, I'll cast him off entirely."

"Is it give him your cast clothes, your honour? then that same would be a charity: for he hasn't a stitch to his back, but what Judy earns or begs for him; and it's little that same that Judy can earn now, God help her."

"Why, Barney, it is not four months since I gave you money at R——."

"Six months, your honour, and eleven days, come next Saturday; and we writ to Mr. O'Berne when our cow was driv, and the spal-

* The usual price of common schools in Ireland.

peens put my garone in the pound, only it died by the way; but I'll be even with the rapscallions any how. But, as I was saying, yer honour, when Thady O'Berne—that is, Mr. O'Berne, saving your presence—when he paid my rent for me, he says, 'Barney,' says he, 'when you are next in want of money, you must go and look after it yourself;' and so your honour we took him at his word; and Judy and I, we locked up the cabin, and canted the beds, and put the key in the tatch, and came all the ways here to look for your honour, in the name of God."

"What, is Judy along with you?"

"Is it the boy ye'd be asking after? To be sure he is, your honour: for, says Judy, says she, 'I'll never let the sight of Nancy's child,' says she, 'go out of my eyes till I get the look of her own; and then, Barney,' says she, 'I'll be ready to go where God calls me: for it's an evil day that I spend night after night thinking and dreaming of her that's gone from me.'"

Fitzosborne remained for some minutes lost in thought: he then renewed the conversation,

in his usual kind conciliatory tone—"I am thinking, Barney, it is high time I should provide for you all, as I have long promised to do, you know."

"Well, then, long life to your honour, it's myself thinks the same this many a day."

"And I think, Barney, after all, Ireland's not so pleasant a place to live in, as some other countries."

Barney stared; it was a proposition so entirely new to him: after a silence of a few seconds, during which, he first looked on the ground, then up to the ceiling—then shifted the weight of his body from the left leg to the right, and stuck his blackthorn stick against his side for support—he at last replied, "Why, yes, your honour, only for the matter of dying there, and being buried where your father was often buried before ye."

"Come, my good fellow, you must sit down, and let us talk this matter over quietly."

"Then that's what I intended saying to your honour's self," rejoined Barney, as, deliberately

placing his hat on the floor, and folding the skirts of his coat across his knees, he deposited himself in one of Fitzosborne's best arm-chairs, at the same time continuing his speech without interruption—" For Judy, says she, 'Barney, what is the good of living here at the back of God's speed to die every day of our lives with distress and starvation: for Barney,' says she, 'no good luck has ever been over the cabin, since Nancy my darling darkened the door the last time ever we see'd her;' though it was then that we both hid our faces, your honour, for fear she'd know we'd been crying: and when we ran down the boreen,* just to catch a peep of the chay as it turned off the bog, didn't we send our blessing after her in the name of St. Ann, and St. Patrick, and the Blessed Virgin? And sure enough it went wid her, for sorrow a blessing we ever had since." The man passed his rough hands across his eyes, ashamed of the tears which he could not restrain. Fitzosborne continued unmoved.

* Boreen—green lane.

"And now, don't you think you would be much happier any where else than in Kerry?"

"Why, that's what Judy was saying before we left the town. 'Barney, let us step over and spake to his honour in Lunnun,' says she: 'for it's not happier I'll ever be till Nancy herself takes the pain out of my heart;' and so your honour, if you would be plazed just to let us oncet put the spake on her, we'd go quietly home, with the blessing of God, and live on our manes till your father's honour dies, long life to him."

"But now, Barney, didn't you tell me that you had sold all your beds, and that your cow was drove, and your horse dead?"

"And sarrow word of lie I tould your honour, at all—at all; and even to the web that poor Judy was blaching for shirts for the boy. And only the wheel was scored from the linen board, would'n't they have taken it as they did her clock-reel, the spalpeens, and sa'ar a taste I owed him, at all—at all."

* Wheels stamped from the Linen Board in Ireland cannot be seized for rent.

"Why, Barney, you *must* have been in arrear, you know; and as I was saying—"

"Not a taste in life, your honour—not so much as would jingle on a tomb-stone. Didn't I pay up my quarter's rint—and county ciss—and church ciss—and tithes—and Easter dues—and my stations for the jubilee, which was the year of our great misfortins in regard of the currency, and all?—and didn't I git my quittance from the priest, all but three-and-fourpence I owed his rivrence at Christmas, and has receipts for that same.—I mean the spalpeen, Pazzy Rourke? Only Mr. O'Shane, that lives in the slated house on the hill, who is my landlord, bad luck to him, didn't he run away, and he owing three gales to my Lord's agent; and were not we poor cottiers driv three times this year for that same, oncet for our own rints to Mr. O'Shane, and the rist for his rints to my Lord?"

"Just so, Barney; and I am sure no man would like to live in such a country as that.

Don't you see all we gentlemen that have it in our power to live where we please—don't you see we all get away from Ireland as fast as we can?"

"Why, yes, your honour, that's true, sure enough; but then, may be, yez have no nat'ral call to it as we poor cottiers have, bekase we have nothing left to us, at all—at all, but our bogs and our skins, as a body may say."

"Now, Barney, what would you say to me, if I provided you with a comfortable home, with a snug cabin and garden, and may be a farm of thirty or forty acres, that you would have no rent to pay for?"

"Then might the blessing of God and the Virgin be about ye, and give yez a happy death! May the angel put it down for yez, and remember St. Patrick of it at the last day."* And Barney slid off his chair on his knees, and remained in prayer long after

* This adjuration was once made to the author by a poor Irishwoman.

audible sounds had ceased to proceed from the mouth which still moved, partly in utterance and partly in agitation.

"But if I did all this for you, it would be on the condition that you took an oath—a solemn oath, Barney—never to tell a human being any thing that ever passed in the cabin, you know, Barney."

"Well, then," said Barney, resuming his erect position, "it's not a word, good or bad, that Barney M'Clane would whisper about it to man or baste, barring to Father Murphy himself, if I chanced to be dying; and he, you know, knows all about it already, your honour."

"Knows all about it!—What do you mean?" And Fitzosborne's countenance betrayed a slight agitation, as that of his companion relapsed into the keen, sarcastic expression of cunning and self-possession, which was its usual most distinguishing trait, when not under the influence of those violent passions, or deep-toned sensibilities, which are equally insepa-

rable from the composition of a true Irish character.

With a most provoking look of composure, Barney replied—"Why, sure, doesn't Father Murphy know whether himself was there or not, at all—at all?"

"And for his sake, Barney, it is right not to say any thing about it: for tho' you and Judy are right good Catholics, you know Nancy and I are of the Established Church; so Father Murphy himself would not like to have the matter talked of in any way."

"And it's the more's the pity.—Och! that ever I consinted to breed up my own sister's child in the way I did!—I that would go thro' fire and water to save the very hair of her head, God bless her; and lovely fine hair she had, the cratur, as black as Kilkinny coal; and her fair sonsy face looking out under it."

"Well, Barney, think of what I've been saying, for I must leave you now."

Barney M'Clane possessed a full share of

the acuteness natural to his countrymen, and he remembered having more than once been flattered by Fitzosborne's promises, though he had never received any so distinct or positive as his present offer. His answer, therefore, was not long delayed.

"Then it's Judy herself will be proud to hear it, if I knew what to tell her, your honour."

"Why you may tell her this—that if you will take an oath, which you know, Barney, is no great things—you often take them at the quarter sessions—if you will take the oath I told you of, and she another, never to tell the boy any thing about me, nor, in short, trouble me any more about him, then I will provide you with a snug cabin, and garden, and a farm, rent-free."

"In Ireland, I suppose, your honour? Somewhere not far from Ballyfoyle, I hope; for I'm thinking, somehow, I'll never get my health any where out of Ballyfoyle bog, till I die there."

"Now, you cannot misunderstand me, Barney?" added Fitzosborne.

"Then if yer honour's honour would be plazed just to write it in a bit of a noat for poor Judy; for I'm ould now, God help me! and has lost all the larning I ever had."

Fitzosborne had, on former occasions, proved the obstinate pertinacity with which the worthy Mr. M'Clane could stand to any point on which he had resolved; and he therefore saw it would only be a loss of time to endeavour to persuade him to leave the house without the satisfaction he had thought proper to require. Besides, Fitzosborne, for once, was in earnest: he considered it, in many respects, desirable that these good people should be provided for before his marriage with Julia took place; and, therefore, with every appearance of candour and good-will, he took up a pen, and hastily wrote the few following lines to his quondam nurse:—

"Dear Judy,—Barney tells me you are ill, which I am very sorry for; and as I am anxious

for your welfare and his, I have promised him, that if he will take an oath never to mention the little frolic that took place at your cabin, four years ago, and if you will bind yourselves on oath never to trouble me any more about Charles, I will give you a cabin and garden, and farm, rent-free, for your lives.

"Yours ever, L. F."

"I suppose your honour's mark is as good as your name any day," said Barney, having carefully perused the paper; "and now, your honour, I'll bring Judy herself, and the boy."

"Now, I'll tell you what, Barney, if you plague me with that boy, I'll never have any thing more to say to you, or him either."

"Then, it's not his mother would say that, if she oncet got a sight of him," replied Barney, more sulkily than Lionel liked, as he carefully folded up the paper, and put it in his breeches-pocket.

"But tell, Judy," continued Fitzosborne, in his most insinuating voice, "how anxious I

am to see her; when will you bring me the answer?"

"Whenever your honour's agrayable," answered Barney, taking up his hat from the floor.

"To-morrow, or next day, if you like, Barney. I am generally at home about this time; and if I should happen to be out, you know you can call again."

"Long life to your honour, and that I will; but sarrow a tester have Judy or I to pay for bit or sup, let alone our dry lodging."

Fitzosborne was prepared for this usual termination of Barney's oratory; but he was too happy at the idea of his visit being at last concluded, and too much pleased with himself at the thought of the expedient he had resolved upon for getting rid, for ever, of so troublesome an applicant, not willingly to accede to his present request, as a preliminary to such future invaluable advantages. He therefore emptied his purse into Barney's hand, who stood almost confounded at such unprecedented generosity;

and then shaking the hard muscular hand, with every appearance of sincere and honest cordiality, Lionel transferred to his servant the honour of ushering Mr. M'Clane down stairs; and whilst the old man cautiously descended, repeating, at every step, "Long life to his honour"—"may a blessing be upon him"—"I'm a made man now entirely, or it's my own fault any how," and similar interjections, the happy Fitzosborne returned to finish his toilet, preparatory to his visit to Julia; of whom he now felt more than ever secure, as the only possible chance of embarrassment was removed, by the fortunate arrival of Mr. Barney M'Clane and his Judy in London.

CHAPTER VI.

A SACRIFICE.

Oh! welcome, sir, stay of my steps in this life:
A guide to all my blessed hopes hereafter!
What comfort, sir?

MASSINGER.

ALTHOUGH Julia, on returning home from Lady Tralee's, retired immediately to her room, she found it impossible to compose herself to sleep. Every thing between her and Fitzosborne had come to a crisis, and yet her own mind was scarcely made up as to her feelings towards him. In vain she ransacked the storehouse of her memory for any one substantial

reason for the dislike which now she almost feared to own. He was indisputably talented —accomplished—handsome—elegant—and peculiarly attractive in his manners. She had never heard any thing against his principles, nor seen the slightest indication of bad temper. He was rich, and held an unalienable rank in society; what reason, then, could she give for refusing him? Her own heart might have whispered a long-cherished preference for another; but she soothed and stilled its throbbings; and having, at last, determined to anticipate Fitzosborne's application to her father, by honestly confiding all her cares to his parental bosom, she cried herself asleep, like the wayward child, who merely weeps because it cannot explain the cause of its uneasiness.

What was then Julia's surprise when, the next morning, on awakening, she found her beloved father watching by her bedside! He had received Lord Alton's letter, and with excited feelings had hurried up to town, to be himself the bearer of his answer. He had

arrived a few minutes only after Julia had set out for Lady Tralee's ball, and spent a great part of the night in anxious and confidential conversation with Lord Alton, who had, in the most unreserved manner, fully opened his mind to Mr. Fielding on all the subjects to which he had alluded in his written communication.

Desirous of sparing his beloved daughter any unnecessary anxiety, and aware that she would not return from Lady Tralee's ball till too late an hour for any conversation, Mr. Fielding had, the night before, cautiously concealed his arrival. But now, impatient once more to behold the darling of his heart, he stole on tip-toe to her room, and watched, with almost impatient anxiety, the termination of her restless slumbers. With feelings of the deepest kind did he trace, as she lay before him, her almost awful resemblance to the sainted mother, whose image was ever present to his memory. The flush of triumph and the spring of joy were no longer visible in the pale cheek, that, motionless and insensible, lay pil-

lowed, as if in that long, last sleep which gives no wakening. Almost breathless, with suspended emotion, his withered hands grasped closely in each other, his gray hairs straggling on his clammy forehead, whilst the big tear dropped slowly on his hands, and his closely-compressed mouth trembled in its corners with convulsive motion; so mournfully did Mr. Fielding watch for some one passing blush—some slight contraction of that pencilled brow, to prove that she was still alive! At last, in mental agony, he repeated Abraham's beautiful prayer, that no heart has ever yet dissented from. The murmurs, though gentle, broke on Julia's ear; the roseate hue again beamed on her cheeks, as the glowing beams of an opening morning; and the next moment the happy girl kissed off the tears that still lay upon her father's visage, and the prayer of the venerable pastor was converted into the thanksgiving of the delighted parent.

When Mr. Fielding saw Julia in life and spirits, he felt as if no other wish remained;

and, gently patting her cheek, he bade her rise, as he would tell her nothing of his journey till he saw her at the breakfast-table; "and see," added he, "Mrs. Norman is busy already preparing your dressing-table; and that reminds me of poor old nurse, who sent a thousand blessings to her darling." So saying, Mr. Fielding left Julia to commence her toilet, which was made with more alacrity and joy than if it had been in preparation for the gayest festival that London had to offer.

Much to their mutual satisfaction, they breakfasted alone; for Lady Harriet Moreton was not up, and Lord Alton was gone out; and long before the cheerful meal was finished, Mr. Fielding entered on the subject of Lord Alton's letter, which, it may be supposed, almost entirely engrossed his thoughts.

"I had fully resolved, my dearest father, to write to you this very day, to ask your advice and direction in regard to Mr. Fitzosborne;" and as Julia said this, she blushed till the tears fell on her burning cheek.

"My advice, love, is, that you should only consult the dictates of your own heart; for whatever contributes to the happiness of my child must insure that of her fond father."

Julia tried to express her thanks; but a deep sigh impeded her utterance, as she thought how little it was in that kind father's power to gratify the wishes of her wayward heart. Mr. Fielding heard the sigh, but misunderstood it, as, in the warmth of generous, but excited feeling, he thus proceeded:—

"Come, come, my Julia, I don't want a confession of all the witcheries of Cupid—your blushing countenance tells me all I want to know, and I quite agree with you that Fitz-osborne is a very fine fellow. To be sure I have seen other young men—but it can't be helped now.—We are not sent into this world to choose our own destinies." Mr. Fielding looked out of the window. The only thing he had predetermined in this conversation, was not to mention Lord Calvert's name; and that was the very word that trembled on his tongue;

for the worthy rector was too frank to be a good diplomatist. So taking Lord Alton's letter out of his pocket, he handed it over to Julia, saying, "There, my love, read that, it will tell you all I know myself;" and one of the first sentences Julia cast her eyes upon, contained that very talismanic name which her father had so firmly resolved not to mention.

That name, more than all the rest the letter contained, rivetted Julia's attention. She was surprised to find that Lord Tralee had already been in communication with Lord Alton; and now, more than ever, determined not to mention what had passed between her and Lionel at the rectory. But when she came to the passage in the letter which alluded to Lord Calvert, and that she again read a further confirmation of his total indifference to her, her spirits and composure at once gave way, and crossing her arms on the table, she laid her head upon them and burst into a flood of tears.

Mr. Fielding was alarmed at the excess of her emotion. "What *is* the matter, my be-

loved Julia?—What *can* occasion all this misery?"

"Oh! my father, I am so mortified—so humbled—so ashamed, that I should have thus so much betrayed my feelings!"

Mr. Fielding, astonished, took up Lord Alton's letter, to seek in it some explanation of Julia's agitation, when his eye rested on the following sentence:—"Lady Harriet tells me she is convinced that Julia is attached to Mr. Fitzosborne." This seemed to give Mr. Fielding all the information he required; and affectionately taking Julia's hand, as it lay all wet with tears—"Ashamed! my dearest girl—and why should you be ashamed?—If you had fancied yourself in love—or romanced yourself in love, with a man who did not care or think about you—or even if you had acted with the vanity that, by some, is attributed to your sex, and misconstrued those little attentions, which all men pay to a pretty girl, and exaggerated them into a demonstration of violent attachment—"

"Oh! spare me—spare me!" exclaimed Julia, clasping her hands in agony, and looking in her father's face with all the pallidness, and more than all the grace of Guido's Magdalenes.

"Why, my dear girl, I am not accusing *you* of such folly; I know my Julia is superior to such contemptible nonsense. But here is a man in every respect worthy of you—approved both by your father and your uncle—whose attachment to you is open and honourable, and whose family come forward with every liberal proposal."

"I hardly know either Lady Tralee or her daughters," interrupted Julia, catching as it were at every failing hope.

"I consider that of no consequence," replied Mr. Fielding: "it would have been indelicate in Mr. Fitzosborne to have made his attachment to you public, until he received the sanction of your family; and as to his father, nothing can be handsomer than Lord Tralee's offer of settlement."

A pause of some seconds ensued; at last,

Julia, making one last faint struggle, whilst again the deepening blush passed over her cheek,—"I am afraid, father—I know not how it is—but I feel I do not—cannot love Mr. Fitzosborne, as much as he deserves."

"I believe, Julia, you are tolerably certain you do not love any other?" said her father, with a smile.

"Oh! yes, I am indeed; I assure you, upon my word and honour, dearest father, that whatever—"

Mr. Fielding saw and pitied her confusion, and kissing her forehead, he thus interrupted her—"Say no more, my dearest girl; I am quite satisfied of your preference of Mr. Fitzosborne; and so I have no doubt would he be if he heard you. So may God bless you both! and here he comes himself to receive my benediction."

Lionel's fine figure, at that moment, appeared at the entrance of the further room. Mr. Fielding, with all the generous warmth of feeling which so often led him beyond the

common forms of life, advanced to meet him with a cordial frankness that Lionel scarcely could misjudge. Collected, and master of his feelings, as Fitzosborne always was, perhaps his self-possession was never so invaluable to him as it was precisely at that moment: with the eye of a lynx, he saw the different feelings of Julia and her father, which neither could conceal, and profiting by the opportune interruption, he drew Mr. Fielding aside; and ere Julia's agitation was by any means subdued, she saw her father shake Lionel cordially by the hand, and pass through the outer door, whilst Fitzosborne himself, with a radiant countenance and eager step, advanced into the room where she was sitting.

Covering her face with her handkerchief, whilst every breath was a sob, and every thought a pang, poor Julia waited his approach in silence, vainly endeavouring to conquer, or even to account for her emotion. Lionel's harmonious voice, as in the most soothing tones he renewed his protestations of unalterable attach-

ment, at first might have indicated an indifference to her feelings, and a command over his own, scarcely compatible with the vehemence of that passion he so eloquently pleaded; but, by degrees, Julia's emotion became infectious, and at last starting from his seat, he exclaimed in a tone of irritation—"Good God! Julia—Miss Fielding—what am I to understand by your protracted silence?—for God's sake explain yourself."

"I know," replied Julia, making at last a desperate effort to speak, and gaining composure as she proceeded, whilst an intensity of feeling, which Lionel had till then never known, kept him silent—"I believe—I am willing to credit all you say, Mr. Fitzosborne; and I assure you, I am—indeed I am—*very* grateful for a partiality which I feel is more than I deserve. But Mr. Fitzosborne, if I am to be your wife, it is right you should know my real sentiments. I ought, however painful the confession may be"—here Julia hid her face in both her hands—"I ought to tell you that all my

early prepossessions—all my fondest hopes were once centred in another. I will not deny—I cannot deny—that once—but however, with equal sincerity I tell you that time is past: nay, listen to me," and Julia's dignity returned, as the mortifying confession passed her lips, "I wish you, Fitzosborne, could read my heart as its Creator sees it. I once preferred—for why should I conceal even the name?—I once preferred Lord Calvert to all mankind. But now, convinced of his indifference to me, no vestige of my former partiality remains; and I blush, even to myself, when I think of its ever having been. I should be insincere, Mr. Fitzosborne, if I professed to feel for you the same as once I felt for him. Oh! no! one never loves but once! but if the remains of an almost withered heart—if my esteem can supply the loss of warmer feelings—"

Fitzosborne allowed her not to finish the sentence: seizing the hand which now she attempted not to withdraw, he thanked her again and again for a happiness, which no me-

mory of his injured friend disturbed—till Julia, worn out by the violence of her own but ill-suppressed regrets, requested him to leave her for the present; and inviting him with one of her most winning smiles to return on the morrow, she retired to her own room, to seek that composure which seemed to have fled from her agitated heart for ever.

CHAPTER VII.

A DECLARATION.

"God wist thee save, brave outlaw, Murray!
Thy ladye, and all thy chyvalrye."
"Marry, thou's wellcum, gentelman,
Some king's messenger thou seemis to be."
Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.

When Mr. Fielding parted from Fitzosborne, he directed his steps towards Lord Ellesmere's; and just as he was turning the corner of Regent Street, he met Lord Calvert in his curricle. At first, from an ill-defined feeling of wounded pride, he would have passed him with merely a slight recognizance; but the short,

abrupt energy with which, on seeing him, Lord Calvert reined-in his horses—the cordial smile with which he hailed his venerable friend, although the smile was soon disturbed, and the brow was saddened, by an intuitive conviction that Mr. Fielding's arrival was the prelude to Julia's marriage. These rapid indications of welcome, which Lord Calvert's speaking countenance betrayed, induced Mr. Fielding to turn aside; and crossing the pavement, he received Lord Calvert's extended hand as frankly and as kindly as it was tendered.

"Very glad to see you—when did you come to town?"—and, "Why, Calvert, you are grown thin?" were the salutations that were uttered simultaneously.

"I was just going to St. James's Square," said Mr. Fielding; and, "I am going for a few days to Windsor," replied Lord Calvert, neither thinking of what they were saying.

"By the bye, I don't know whether to congratulate you or not, on your new appointment, Calvert; I am half sorry you are going to Russia."

Lord Calvert threw the lash of his whip on the off ear of the near horse; and then answered, as coolly as he could, "I suppose, however, I may soon offer *you* my congratulations."

"What! Fitzosborne has told you, then?—Yes; I believe it is all settled—good bye."

And with this they parted; for neither felt perfectly at ease when conversing with each other on the subject of Julia's marriage.

When Mr. Fielding entered Lady Ellesmere's drawing-room, he found no person at home but Lady Matilda, whose joy at seeing him was somewhat damped, by the same reflection which had crossed her brother's mind, as to the probable occasion of his visit. In a few minutes, however, the conversation took an unexpected turn.

"I am delighted, my dear Lady Matilda, to find you alone; for I am charged with a very particular message from Lord Alton. Cannot you possibly guess the subject of it?"

"Indeed I cannot;" and Lady Matilda's evident confusion was in direct contradiction to her words.

"Now, tell me, are we likely to be interrupted for some little time?—I want a serious conversation with you."

"I declare, you are quite awful with all your preliminaries. Mamma and Louisa are out driving, but I believe they will return immediately;" and poor Lady Matilda walked towards the window, under the pretext of looking for them, but, in reality, to conceal her agitation.

"Then, my dear Lady Matilda, you must consider me a zephyr, or as Mercury: in short, I am elected a herald-pursuivant of Love this morning; now, do you understand me? Don't you think my gray hairs are appropriate to the character, whatever my parson's coat may be? But come, I see you are half ready to cry; so, as I have had crying enough this morning, on the same subject, with my dearest Julia—of whom more anon—I will not plague you any more, but proceed at once to my commission."

The kind-hearted old man had only assumed this tone of raillery, in order to give Lady

Matilda time to recover her agitation; and now, taking her kindly by the hand, he led her to a seat, and proceeded to deliver her Lord Alton's message, the subject of which she had already guessed.

Having told her in as few words as possible the esteem and admiration which she had excited in the Earl, and having, in manifold parentheses, expressed a small portion of his own veneration for Lord Alton, he continued in the same tone of almost parental affection, which always marked his address to her—"And now, my dear girl, perhaps you may wonder why Lord Alton never spoke to you himself on this subject—at least explicitly: but, in very truth, he was diffident of himself; whilst a world, as it were, is at his feet; and whilst old and young, and rich and fair, and men and women, too, unite in admiration of his talents, and in esteem for his virtues. Whilst I say any other man but himself would feel confident of obtaining the regard, even of such a woman as you, my dear Matilda, Lord Alton

can think of nothing but the disparity between your age and his. In short, whilst your tastes, and pursuits, and character, and rank in life, are all so similar, he feels doubtful of your acceptance of him as a husband, because he has exactly that experience in which you are deficient."

"How can Lord Alton think so unjustly of himself!—Who ever would listen to the young fops of the day, that had the alternative of Lord Alton's conversation!" exclaimed Lady Matilda, hurried by the enthusiasm of the moment into a confession of her sentiments, which she saw, by Mr. Fielding's smiling looks, had not been unobserved by him.

"At all events it is evident that your Ladyship rises above all such foolish prejudices.—I only wish, Matilda, he had been here to witness your conviction; for you can neither contradict your words nor blushes. Well, tell me, when may I send him to receive his sentence?"

"You may tell his Lordship, that I—" and poor Lady Matilda could not articulate another

syllable—as a loud knock at the hall-door announced Lady Ellesmere's return; and scarcely knowing what she did, she meditated an escape into her own room.

"I'll tell you what, Lady Matilda," cried out Mr. Fielding, as he followed her towards the door, knocking his fore-finger to his nose in mock solemnity, "though I have been made a messenger of the gods once, I will take back no prudish nonsensical answer unworthy of you to send, or him to receive—so my Lord Alton shall be henceforward his own negociator; and, hark ye, Matilda," added he, as he held the door in his hand, and called after her as she ascended the stairs, "here's your mother, and I shan't tell her one word about the matter—I have other business for her Ladyship's attention;" and so saying, he almost playfully shut the door, and turned to meet the Countess with the benevolent gaiety of one who believed in the happiness of those, round whom his fondest feelings twined.

Ere many minutes had elapsed, Lady Louisa

entered her sister's room—her face flushed, and her eyes sparkling in an agitation, evidently partaking more of grief than joy.—"So!" exclaimed she, throwing herself into a chair almost breathless—"So!—It's all fixed, I hear."

"Not fixed, Louisa—not *fixed*."

"Oh! but it is though; and Mr. Fielding says Lord Alton has behaved most handsomely."

"I rather think, Louisa, it would not be so fully settled without my knowledge, and I assure you—"

"Ah, but Julia, you see, has disappointed us all. Mr. Fielding says she has positively accepted that disagreeable Mr. Fitzosborne; that it *is* all settled; and that they are to be married immediately—I dare say before he leaves town. Now, what do you think of all this?"

Poor Lady Matilda had not power to arrange, much less express, her thoughts. She noticed not the mistake into which she had so naturally fallen; she reflected not on the future prospects either of herself or of Julia. One sole idea

occupied her mind, and that was the image of Lord Calvert's misery, and his consequent banishment to Russia.

How long the two sisters might have remained in cogitation together is uncertain, had they not been interrupted by Lady Matilda's maid, who came to deliver to her a note; adding, that the gentleman was waiting for an answer in the dining-room."

"Lady Matilda blushed deeply as she perused the billet; she rose from her chair, and—sat down again—she told her Abigail to say she was not at home; and immediately afterwards called after her, to say she was coming down directly. She ran up to her astonished sister, and having stood for a minute or two directly opposite to her, in total silence, she abruptly exclaimed, "Nonsense! how can I be such a fool?" and then walked out of the room as sedately and dignified, as if her heart was as calm as her manners, and as if its pulsations were neither audible nor frequent.

Whether the gentleman who was waiting for

his answer, was the shoemaker or the hairdresser, or a mere stranger, *reste à savoir.* But this, however, is indubitable; that when Lord Ellesmere returned, at a late hour, from his ride, he caught a glimpse of Lady Matilda, running up stairs; but he was prevented from calling to her, by his servant informing him that Lord Alton was waiting for him in his Lordship's study. In about half an hour, the hall-door was observed to shut after the Earl; and Lord Ellesmere, with a smiling countenance, but a tearful eye, entered the drawing-room in quest of his beloved Matilda. He found her seated on the couch, beside the Countess,—her arms clasped round Lady Ellesmere's waist, and her face concealed in her mother's bosom; whilst the happy parent, with eyes turned up to heaven, seemed lost in mental prayer and thanksgiving.

Lady Louisa was infinitely less composed; she jumped about the room, her pocket-handkerchief in her hand, and the tears streaming down her laughing cheeks; whilst, before Lord

Ellesmere could speak, she threw her arms round his neck, and almost suffocating the old man, exclaimed, "Dearest papa, are you not happy!—only I wish he was ten years younger."

Dinner seemed a little to compose the agitated feelings of this happy and united family, and Lord Ellesmere joined the ladies in the drawing-room, even at an earlier hour than usual. There, Lady Matilda, seated between both her parents, with one hand affectionately held by each, replied, with more composure than she could have hoped, not only to all their queries, but even to the gay raillery of her delighted sister.

"How very odd it is now, Matilda, that you should never have told me a word of all this!"

"I had nothing to tell, dearest Louisa, till this morning."

"And when, Matilda, did you take such a fancy to Lord Alton?" inquired the Countess anxiously.

"I don't know, indeed, mamma; unless it was when I first saw him at the rectory."

"And now, Matilda, honour bright, when he gave you that book, did not you think he meant something by it?" inquired Lady Louisa, very thoughtfully; for, as she afterwards confessed, Mr. Russel had, half in earnest and half in jest, offered her a beautiful copy of Weber's last opera.

"Not I, indeed, Louisa; I only knew my own heart, not his."

"Well!" rejoined Lord Ellesmere, "I must say, I was seldom more surprised, and never more pleased, than with Lord Alton's conversation this morning."

"Ah! my dearest Lord," replied the Countess, "a mother's heart supplies the want of superior penetration. I saw, Matilda, how much Lord Alton admired you the very first day we dined at his house; and I was confirmed in my suspicions at the Duchess of Chester's."

"Just then, a sharp quick rap was heard at the hall-door; footsteps sounded on the

stairs: Lady Matilda blushed; Lady Ellesmere smiled; Lady Louisa gave a most intelligent "he—hem;" and the Earl, with a willingly extended hand, welcomed Lord Alton before he had reached the middle of the drawing-room.

Whilst the family party at St. James's Square spent one of those happy evenings, the memory of which shines through the mists of time, like the morning star, whose brightness fades, not in darkness, but in increasing lustre. A different scene was passing at Lord Alton's house. Mr. Fielding, in the exuberance of his happiness, imparted to Lady Harriet Moreton the intelligence of Julia's marriage. She received the news with an unmoved countenance; a hectic spot for an instant flushed her cheek, but it was gone ere you could say it lightened; and the lovely smile, that the next moment played round her mouth, and the grace with which she held towards Mr. Fielding the flexible little hand which rivalled the snow in whiteness, gave to her congratulations

a charm beyond the force of words; and seemed again a confirmation of the almost universal *refrain,* that "Lady Harriet Moreton was assuredly a delightful woman."

The violent agitation which poor Julia had undergone in the morning, fell with increased effect upon her weakened frame, as she vainly endeavoured to assume a degree of cheerfulness, which the actual depression of her spirits rendered doubly irksome. To be less than happy in the presence of either her father or her uncle, she considered as ingratitude for all their kindnesses, their generosity, their affection. And yet how could she, unused as she was to every kind of guile—how could she wear the livery of joy, when every thought was misery?

It was at last no falsity to say that a severe head-ache prevented her joining the family at dinner-time; a little note, curiously folded, and carefully worded, brought at one and the same time Lady Harriet's felicitations at her nuptials, and regrets at her indisposition: a kind

sentence, written in pencil, and shut up with her pine-apple, conveyed to her Lord Alton's more sincere and affectionate regards; whilst her kind father, believing that rest and quietness were all that Julia needed to recruit her spirits, left her, at her own request, alone: and when Lord Alton proceeded to Lord Ellesmere's, and Lady Harriet commenced her nightly routine of joyless dissipation, the young and beautiful Julia, in the solitude of her own apartment, wept, as she thought of the pleasures that were gone, and shuddered, as she dwelt in anticipation on the future.

With wonder and remorse did she recall to herself the waywardness of her own mind. Why had she consented to marry Fitzosborne, if her prepossessions were so unconquerable against him? and what reasonable ground could she allege in justification of those prejudices? At one time she had almost determined to send for her father, to lay open her whole soul to him; to confess her invincible attachment to Lord Calvert, and to implore his

permission to retract her promise to Fitzosborne. But what excuse could she offer for such capricious, such inconsistent conduct? No person had attempted to influence her choice; she had accepted Lionel of her own free will: she had not even the pretext of any one act or error of his, to authorise so ungenerous, so improper a trespass on any gentleman's feelings, much less on those which had always been flattering, if not gratifying towards her. She thought of Lord Tralee's liberality; of Lord Alton's generosity. With that, came the recollection of his letter, and the observations it contained regarding Lord Calvert; and hiding her blushing face with both her hands, she terminated her painful meditations, in humble and heartfelt prayer to that God who is the wretch's hope,—that he would mercifully grant to her fortitude to support whatever it might be his gracious purpose to ordain.

The next morning, the calm of resignation supplied the place of happiness; and with a radiant smile playing over her still pallid cheek,

she met her uncle and her father in the breakfast-room. Lady Harriet Moreton had not yet risen, her morning slumbers being protracted in proportion to her midnight vigils; but her absence was, in truth, scarcely regretted by any of the little party, as a domestic scene was the only one Lady Harriet Moreton was ill qualified to adorn.

"And now, Julia," said Mr. Fielding, with increased animation, "wish Lord Alton joy: do not flatter yourself that you are the only young lady who stands on the list for preferment."

"I am going to give you a new relation," said Lord Alton—he was going to say "aunt;" but as his only claim to being Julia's uncle was through his first wife, it would have been an awkward method of announcing his second marriage.

Julia's eyes inquired, even before her tongue could ask, who was the lady whom the Earl had chosen; and when she learnt that her beloved friend was thus the favourite of fortune, her

heart felt a spring of joy she scarcely hoped to have ever known again. It was a new tie with those round whom all her affections lingered; and besides—for where is the friendship in which some latent selfishness has never mingled?—besides, it seemed to open a renewal of their intercourse; for, in the inmost recesses of her heart, she had vowed never to return to Ellesmere Park, or even its vicinity, when once she had become the wife of Lionel.

If any thing could have increased the happiness of Lord Alton, it was to see the cordial and sincere participation in his feelings which Julia and her father alike evinced. A far more painful scene, however, awaited him; it was the communication of his intentions to Lady Harriet; and as both Mr. Fielding and Julia foresaw the possibility of some unpleasant altercation, they both almost simultaneously proposed walking to St. James's Square, with perhaps even less hesitation from the circumstance of both being aware of Lord Calvert's absence. Julia forgot her having appointed

Fitzosborne to call upon her that morning. She almost ceased to think he was even in existence; she only thought—she only felt she was again going to that house which had been as her home; and that in witnessing the happiness of her beloved Matilda, it was scarcely possible to believe that she herself was—wretched.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISCLOSURES.

Give sorrow words : the grief that doth not speak,
Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break.

MACBETH.

WHEN Julia and her father arrived in St. James's Square, they found Lord and Lady Ellesmere, with Lady Louisa, still loitering in the breakfast parlour, Lady Matilda having at the sound of their knock at the hall-door taken refuge in her morning sitting-room up stairs.

Nothing could exceed the kindness with which the Earl and Countess received their

beloved Julia; but yet there was a reserve almost amounting to gravity in their deportment, which ill accorded with the affectionate good wishes for her happiness which they so often reiterated: had Julia's own thoughts and feelings been less engaged, perhaps she would have noticed this circumstance, on which Lady Louisa's manners might have served as a commentary; for though at first she scarcely returned Julia's salute, after a moment's pause she added, with an almost melancholy expression, "Yet, after all, dearest Julia, I do sincerely wish you joy;—or rather, I hope you will be happy, even though—"

Lady Ellesmere interrupted Lady Louisa by asking Julia, in the kindest tone, if she would not like to go and see Matilda? and in an instant, profiting by the implied permission, she was already on her way to her friend's apartment.

The walk had given a brilliancy to her complexion, which seemed like the lustre of happiness. Without waiting for an answer to

her tap at the door, she opened it, and putting in her head, asked leave to come in; and, as the next moment she rushed into Lady Matilda's arms, she seemed like the rosy harbinger of love and joy; bringing, in reality, that felicity to her friend which she came in all sincerity to proffer.

In a few moments the two fair brides elect were seated at the window, enjoying, once more, the delights of unreserved and uninterrupted intercourse. But no sooner had the flush subsided, which on the moment of Julia's entrance beamed on her glowing cheek, than the alteration of her appearance became visible to her anxious companion; and after a pause of some minutes, Lady Matilda observed, in a playful tone, somewhat irrelevant to her actual feelings, "And now, Julia, have *you* nothing to tell me of yourself? no confidence to make in return for mine?" and as she spoke she laid her hand on that of Julia, that hung careless on the window-frame. Poor Julia tried to speak; but fearful to trust her voice, she merely smiled

as she returned in silence Lady Matilda's kindly pressure.

"Why, Julia, you are grown prudish, I declare. Now, I allowed you to congratulate me as much as you liked, and, you see, I do not disclaim your kindness. Are you determined to keep silence till I wish you joy in due form?"

Julia still paused; then, in a deep and almost hollow voice, replied, "There's nothing in this world can make me joy;" and as she said this she turned her head to look out of the window. A pot of lily-of-the-valley caught her eye as it stood on the window-stool: the association of ideas it recalled were too strong for her, and the big tears dropped slowly and unnoticed on her hand.

"Good God! dearest Julia, what can this mean? What!—still silent? Do, I conjure you, Julia, give me some explanation of these tears."

"Alas! I cannot—I have none to give."

"Tell me, Julia," returned Lady Matilda,

with hurried eagerness, "is not every thing fixed for your marriage with Mr. Fitzosborne?"

"It is," replied Julia; and one deep, long-drawn sigh seemed to ingulf all her sorrows.

"And is he not the object of your choice?—your own, free, unbiassed choice?" It seemed, as Lady Matilda said this, as if her eyes would have penetrated into Julia's soul.

"My choice! Good God!"

"What can this mean? Here is some mystery—some error—some foul play. Oh! Julia, Julia, speak to me—I conjure you, speak to me. Tell me, for the love of heaven, what you mean."

Julia gazed, as if in wildness. "Mystery!—error!—what have I said? Oh! Matilda, spare me, I hardly know what I am doing;" and, as she spoke, she passed her hand across her dewy forehead, as if seeking in vain to collect her scattered thoughts. Lady Matilda gazed upon her with an intensity of feeling compounded alike of horror—doubt—and grief.

"Julia, alas! alas! you are unhappy. Why will you not confide in me?—trust to me?"

The tone of deep commiseration in which Lady Matilda spoke, seemed to recall at once a consciousness to that mind, which so long had vibrated to every proof of her affection. Bursting into tears, Julia only muttered, "'tis too late," and fell, for a moment, senseless on Lady Matilda's shoulder. But it was only for a moment: the mental fortitude which so strongly marked her character soon prevailed over bodily infirmity; she soon raised her now tearless eyes to the countenance of her friend, and then throwing her arms round Matilda's neck, she drew her cheek closer to her own, and as she imprinted on it a kiss of gratitude and friendship, she murmured softly, "Ask me nothing, Matilda; my doom is fixed—irrevocably fixed."

Lady Matilda, in a few seconds, rose from her seat, under pretence of obtaining a glass of water, to recruit poor Julia's spirits; for her cheek still bore the pallid hue of death; but, in

reality, her motive was to gain a moment's reflection, in order to decide on how to act. At last, returning with all that composure which usually gave such dignity to her address, she again approached Julia, and in a tone in which seriousness blended with affection—"I cannot, Julia," said she, "witness all this evident misery without at least making one effort for its redress. If you do not choose to tell me all you feel—for, Julia, I cannot command your confidence, though heaven knows what I would give to gain it—if you will not tell me all, answer me, at least, two questions sincerely—are you determined to marry Mr. Fitzosborne?"

"I am," replied Julia, in the calm, deep tone of utter hopelessness.

"And has any person urged you to this match, or is it one of your own unbiassed choice?"

"No person has urged me to it, and it is my own free choice," steadily answered Julia.

"Then, Julia, I have done; and I can only regret that my infatuated brother has fixed his

affections upon one whose unbiassed choice leads her to prefer another."

As Lady Matilda said this, her eyes rested almost sternly on Julia; whilst she, scarcely conscious of existence, moved not—breathed not—her lips were parted, not to speak, but hear, as if every sense was lost in that single faculty, which yet conveyed no image distinctly to her comprehension.

"I cannot understand you, Matilda," at last slowly whispered Julia. "You do not mean to mock me, surely?"

"Julia, for your own sake—for his—for all our sakes—let *me*, at least, explain myself.—Since your earliest infancy you, and you alone, have been the object of Oswald's love; and still, even now, he cherishes for you an attachment as sincere as it is hopeless."

"And do you believe all this?" said Julia, with the bitter laugh of scorn with which despair derides itself.

"Believe it?—I know it—I can prove it.—What else is it that drives him from his home

—his country?—what but the certainty of your attachment to another?"

"My attachment to another!" and once more the quick blush fevered her burning cheek.

"Yes, Julia, I repeat it.—You cannot have misunderstood my brother's feelings.—You must have been aware, even at the rectory, of that attachment, which was visible to all the world."

"Ay, Matilda, he did impose upon me once: I believed; and shame, shame on my credulity." As she spoke, the hectic blush grew deeper, and the sparkling eyes beamed brighter; whilst, as she proudly drew her commanding figure to its height, she slowly continued—"I believed, fond foolish girl that I was—I believed, because I wished, that I was Lord Calvert's choice; but now I am not to be duped again.—I *know* his sentiments, and I will prove my own."

Lady Matilda started from her seat, and walked about the room, clasping her hands in agony, and exclaiming, "Oh! Julia! Julia!

what a wreck of happiness!—I told you there was mystery—foul play:—that wretch Fitzosborne!"

"There is no mystery, Matilda," resumed Julia, now infinitely the most composed of the two. "As the time is past, I may, for the last time, acknowledge what I have already confessed to Mr. Fitzosborne—that once I felt a regard—a preference for Lord Calvert, that—"

"And you confessed this to Fitzosborne?"

"Unquestionably; but, at the same time, I told him, as I now repeat it, that the time is past, and I now feel as indifferent to him as he has always been to me."

"Oh! Julia, how can you be so ungrateful—so *unjust*—nay, so hypocritical?"

"Dearest Matilda, do not be *unjust* to me. I have proof, unerring proof, of Lord Calvert's sentiments."

"It is false!—It cannot be!" exclaimed Lady Matilda in the energy of her feelings, unconscious of the manner of their expression.

—"You are imposed upon, Julia—that Fitzosborne has betrayed him."

"Matilda, I have seen in Lord Calvert's own hand-writing the mortifying—the unnecessary——spare me, Matilda, I cannot tell you."

"It is some trick—some shameful guileful duplicity.—Either the writing you have seen is a forgery, or it does not bear the construction you have put upon it."

"The letter was to Mr. Fitzosborne: of the words you shall judge yourself—for never, never can I forget them;" and Julia repeated verbatim Lord Calvert's note. Lady Matilda listened in the silence of stupefaction; and Julia in bitter triumph added, "And now, Matilda, do you not believe me?"

Lady Matilda shook her head incredulously. "No, Julia, I cannot, will not believe—there is some mystery; what it is I know not; but may I ask Calvert what all this means?"

Julia paused, and blushed, and then added with a long-drawn sigh—"Matilda, it is better not.—You forget that I am now affianced to

another—it is immaterial—quite immaterial to me what Lord Calvert's sentiments are now, and perhaps——"

"Julia, I cannot rest till this mystery is explained. If he could have been guilty of so cruel, so unnecessary an affront to one——"

"But I have seen his writing, Matilda—there can be no mistake; and if there was, it is too late now. No, no—promise me, Matilda, to let the matter rest.—Do not, I conjure you, turn the confidence you have extorted from me into an aggravation of my misery."

"But shall that man—that Fitzosborne, triumph in his wickedness?—his——"

"You forget, Matilda, that I must henceforward consider Mr. Fitzosborne as my husband. I feel as if already our conversation was improper towards——"

"Either Calvert or Mr. Fitzosborne has behaved unjustifiably; you, Julia, may hesitate which to blame; but I——"

"Matilda," said Julia, rising with dignity, "you have stolen from me a confession which

ought never to have passed my lips; I feel already how wrong I have acted. I must now throw myself on your compassion—your generosity, not to betray that which would only, if known, increase my misery and mortification."

"I cannot promise not to speak to Calvert; at least let me ask him if he really ever did write that horrid letter; you, surely, can have no objection to that, Julia?"

"Alas! What use is it of now?"

"It is always of use to be just, Julia; either he or Mr. Fitzosborne must—"

"Matilda," interrupted Julia, with a composed energy of manner, "be cautious what you do; at least let me esteem my husband, even if another—but now let us go down stairs; Lady Ellesmere and my father will think me lost."

As Julia rose, she again kissed Lady Matilda's cheek; whilst that anxious friend, far more agitated than Julia was, folded her again and again in her arms, in admiration of her unswerving principles and unshaken fortitude.

"Alas!" thought Lady Matilda, "had I but had the courage sooner to urge an explanation! How cold—how timid—how reckless have I been!"

Upon entering the drawing-room, however, the thoughts of both ladies for a moment took another turn. Mr. Russel was at his usual post beside Lady Louisa, at the piano-forte, who immediately, on Julia's appearance, gaily applied to her to join her in one of their favourite duets; but Julia, whose spirits owed their steadiness only to the absence of all exertion, relinquished her part to Mr. Russel; and taking her place beside Lady Ellesmere, found a support, in the quiet kindness of her manner, more soothing than greater demonstrations of affection might have been.

Julia learned that Mr. Fielding, totally unconscious of all that had passed up stairs, had left her with her friends, with the promise of calling for her in an hour, and in the belief that her protracted visit would be happiness to all. But hour after hour had passed away, and

Julia becoming seriously uneasy at his absence, the Countess at last promised to convey her in her carriage to Lord Alton's; though Lady Matilda, for reasons which, if Lady Ellesmere guessed, she did not combat, positively refused to accompany them.

On entering Lord Alton's court, they were surprised to observe an appearance of bustle, unusual in his well-regulated establishment. A travelling carriage and four stood at the door, loaded with trunks, and cap-boxes, and imperials, and all the other insignia of a lady's property. A sulky Abigail was already deposited in the seat behind. Her flaunting pink satin hat was fastened down by a pocket-handkerchief tied under her chin. Her black silk work-bag hung over the dickey behind, with streamers of tapes and cottons appended therefrom. In one hand, she poised the last purchase of a straw bonnet; and in the other, grasped a huge newspaper packet of greasy sandwiches. The footman presented in his appearance an equal compound of London finery and travel-

ling costume. His gold-headed cane still graced his hand; whilst his hat shone in an oiled silk cover, his boots in Warren's blacking; and his pockets were stuffed with shoe-brushes, purloined apples, a dozen pair of new stockings, and his Lady's work-box, which the maid had forgotten; whilst the inside of the carriage seemed so well filled with new books and old bandboxes, as scarcely to leave room for any other occupant.

As Lady Ellesmere and Julia gazed in astonishment at these unexpected indications of departure, Lady Harriet Moreton was seen, swift as an arrow from a bow, to dart down the great staircase, pass through the file of servants in silence, and, with one spring, jump into the carriage, and drive off.

Mr. Fielding, in a few moments, explained the circumstance, partly by words, but much more (than he, good man, intended) by silence. When he and Julia left the house in the morning to call at Lady Ellesmere's, Lord Alton took that opportunity of informing his daugh-

ter of the approaching change in her circumstances. The ill-suppressed mortification and disappointment at the certainty of Fitzosborne's marriage, which notwithstanding all her anticipations of revenge had filled her bosom, was peace, in comparison to the storm of rage with which she now heard the verification of those fears, which, like an avenging phantom, had haunted her through life. To learn that her place in Lord Alton's magnificent establishment was to be, as she termed it, usurped by the very woman whom hitherto she had affected to despise, and whom in reality she both feared and hated, gave such a poignancy to her mortification, as almost to deprive her of utterance. At first she listened, or appeared to listen, in silence, to the generous—nay the profuse liberality, with which Lord Alton proposed to increase her fortune. But, in a few minutes, she lost all power of self-control; and, with equal ingratitude and impolicy, burst into an abuse of Lady Matilda, and a con-

temptuous raillery of her father, that not even the equanimity of Lord Alton could overlook.

The result was such as might easily be anticipated. The father and daughter parted on such terms as could scarcely leave a hope of reconciliation; and when Lady Ellesmere returned to St. James's Square, she could scarcely restrain a confession, that the departure of Lady Harriet Moreton removed the only disagreeable circumstance attending her daughter's union with Lord Alton.

Meantime, Fitzosborne had made his promised visit to Miss Fielding; but having learned somewhat of the altercation with Lady Harriet from the worthy rector, (who did not excel in keeping secrets,) Lionel considered it not a favourable opportunity for making his appearance; and therefore contented himself with leaving a note for Julia, asking permission to postpone his visit till the evening; an attention which, prepossessed as both Lord Alton

and Mr. Fielding were now in Fitzosborne's favour, they failed not to attribute to a delicacy for Lord Alton's feelings, not exactly contemplated by Fitzosborne himself.

CHAPTER IX.

A RENCONTRE.

Blest be the heart of sympathetic mould,
Whatever form that gentle heart unfold,
Whose generous fibres with fond terror shake,
When keen affliction threatens to o'ertake
Young, artless, beauty.

TRIUMPHS OF TEMPER.

WITH all the untiring anxiety of woman's fears, and all the zeal of woman's friendship, did Lady Matilda debate in her own mind the possibility of converting the conversation she had held with Julia Fielding into a means of rescuing her from a labyrinth of misery, in which

she saw, or fancied, her beloved friend was now entangled. The more she deliberated on what had passed, the more the dictates of her cooler judgment confirmed those views which her penetration had first discovered. But yet, the more she reflected on the singular position in which she herself was placed, the greater the difficulties appeared by which she was surrounded.

At first, she determined to consult with Lord Alton, to whom she already involuntarily turned as to her future guide; and happy would it have been had she followed the impulse which led her to seek the assistance of his superior talents. But from this she was unfortunately deterred by the reflection, that as Lord Calvert was her own brother, her doing so might endanger the future amity between him and Lord Alton. For, if investigation should prove that Lord Calvert had by any possibility been induced unnecessarily to wound the feelings of Lord Alton's niece, it could scarcely escape the resentment of the

Earl; and, on the other hand, Lord Alton might consider as impertinent so early an interference on the part of Lady Matilda, in the affairs of a family with which, as yet, she was connected by no other ties than those of friendship.

To consult either her father, mother, or sister, would, in Lady Matilda's mind, have been but an unavailing breach of confidence, both towards Julia and her brother; and thus, as similar arguments applied with added force to Mr. Fielding, no alternative remained to her in this dilemma, but that of submitting tamely to a misery which she still hoped it was possible to avert; or to apply directly to Lord Calvert, on that only subject which she had firmly determined never again to obtrude upon his notice.

On the latter expedient she finally determined; but as he was still out of town, she penned many a letter before she could please herself, as to the mode of making a communication of so peculiarly delicate a nature. But at last, fearful of trusting any details unneces-

sarily to the hazards of the post, she merely determined on sending to him an urgent request, that he would not put off his return to town, but set out instantly on the receipt of her letter, as she wished to speak to him on a business of the utmost importance, which she could not trust to writing, and which would not brook delay.

A resistless fate hung suspended over Julia and Lord Calvert, which seemed to baffle every effort made to avert it. In Lady Matilda's anxiety to proceed with caution and propriety, in the difficult part which she had voluntarily undertaken, she lost the opportunity of rendering her generous interference useful. Her letter was delayed till the following day; and even then it had to follow Lord Calvert from place to place: for ere it reached him, he had commenced a tour of visits, from an anxiety to protract his absence from London, in order, if possible, to avoid the embarrassment of either accepting or refusing an invitation to witness the celebration of Julia's nuptials, which he

had taught himself was otherwise unavoidable, in consequence of the long-established, and even increasing, intimacy between Julia's family and his own.

Another unfortunate circumstance occurred. Lord Alton, more prompt and determined than even Lady Matilda had been, lost not a moment in communicating to Lord Calvert the new tie which was soon so closely to unite them. Lord and Lady Ellesmere, of course, did the same—so did Lady Louisa: the latter adding all the particulars of Julia's marriage-settlement, as she had heard them herself from Mr. Fielding. These communications, of course, had the effect of strengthening Lord Calvert's repugnance to return, and weakening the force of Lady Matilda's request; as he, not unnaturally, concluded, that her communication related solely to her own marriage with Lord Alton; and that her wish to see and speak to him, was merely that not unfrequent anxiety to ask advice upon a subject which has already been decided. Under these impressions, he still

delayed his return—that delay was important; and the explanation which finally recalled him to London, did not reach him till the time was past, when his presence there might have been available.

But, after all, why are the consequences of our own actions so frequently and so falsely attributed to predestination?—When Lord Calvert first saw Julia on his return from the Continent, all his early attachment towards her revived with added force; why then did he trifle with her affections, and not as explicitly declare his sentiments in words, as he implied them by his actions? Fitzosborne, it is true, began his machinations at an early period; but what had they been? He persuaded Lord Calvert that all his family were anxious to promote his marriage with Miss Fielding.—Was that a reason why he should reject the hand of her his heart adored? Fitzosborne told him, that the lovely mistress of his affections—the bride his family marked out for him—was herself not unwilling to bestow herself, and

all her vast inheritance, upon him.—Was that a reason that he should turn in disgust from a happiness that seemed to offer itself to his acceptance? Was Julia Fielding of a character in any respect resembling those foreign sirens, whom he had long since learned to despise?—Alas! what would he have given in after-times for one assurance of that regard which with such wayward sensibility he had thus contemned!—And then what madness, what infatuation was it to put in writing those assertions, as uncalled for as unwise, which scarcely the irritation of the moment could even palliate? But what avail the retrospections of remorse, when every hope of future bliss has vanished?

And Julia, too—if her conduct had been less wayward, less impetuous, and unguarded—how different might her fate have been!—Now, on the contrary, error after error had crowded on her path. It was a dangerous experiment to conceal from her father Fitzosborne's first proposals at the rectory; and it was equally

injudicious, and scarcely less reprehensible, to exclude Lady Matilda so entirely from her confidence. Had she, in either instance, communicated her own sentiments of dislike to Fitzosborne, with that candour which was congenial to her character, how easily might she then have been extricated from her entanglements! And even in London, had she acted with consistency, in uniformly rejecting his addresses, or even consulted those friends who could have judiciously advised her, she would not have found herself so suddenly, and so irremediably involved. It appeared to her impossible to marry the man her heart preferred; and with that acute sensibility, which is natural to her sex and age, she dreaded to return to those scenes of happiness in which that preference had been so innocently cherished. But though these feelings were scarcely reprehensible, they could not justify the folly—to use no harsher name—that hurried her into accepting a man for her husband whom she did

not like, for no better reason, than her not having it in her power to marry him she loved.

But these reflections are needless, after all. Man is seldom master of his destiny; and though the march of misery is often accelerated by our own errors, it is not always certain that it might have been averted by any effort of human wisdom.

In the mean time, nearly a week elapsed unmarked by change or incident. Lady Matilda did not absolutely inform Julia of her having written to Lord Calvert; but Julia, almost unconsciously to herself, concluded she would do so; and with an agitation she scarcely could conceal, waited from day to day in expectation of that explanation she knew not whether most to hope or fear. But day after day passed, and Lord Calvert neither wrote nor came; and Lady Matilda's protracted silence and increasing vexation, sufficiently convinced Julia that she had no further extenuation to offer, where silence was itself conviction.

Fitzosborne was scarcely ever absent from Julia; and with the determined resolution of one whose principles were through life uncompromising, Julia exerted herself to overcome those feelings of incipient doubt and fear, which hitherto his society invariably impressed her with. She felt really grateful for an attachment which seemed on his part daily to increase; she admired his talents, that were now only displayed for her amusement, or to win her praise; and if her rebel heart still whispered its regrets, she called in every aid of wisdom, or of fortitude, to recall the wanderer to the path of duty.

The most irksome task that Julia had to fulfil, was to return the civilities of Lady Tralee and her daughters. Fortunately, the absence of Lady Harriet Moreton served as a pretext for both her and Lord Alton refusing their invitation to a dinner-party, which, under the circumstances in which Lord Alton was placed in regard to Lord Tralee, would have been equally unpleasant to him as to Miss

Fielding. But Lady Tralee was scrupulously attentive in calling on Julia in a morning; and if the latter saw little that was attractive in the manners of her future relatives, she was at least gratified by their kind professions; and even consoled herself with the hope of finding in the youngest Miss Fitzosborne a disposition congenial to her own, when she learned that Betsy had refused to avail herself of her mother's permission to come to London, even on the present joyful occasion—preferring to attend poor Mrs. Smith, who was dangerously ill at Elm Park, rather than participate in the preparations for her brother's marriage.

One day, compounded of joy and grief, was given to Julia: it was the one on which she accompanied Lord Alton and Mr. Fielding to dine at Lord Ellesmere's, where Mr. Russel and Fitzosborne were the only additions to their family circle. Alas! how well might one have been spared! But Julia really felt exhilarated by the happiness of all around her; and with a magnanimity, rewarded only by her

own conscience, and by one approving smile from Lady Matilda, she exerted herself to share the felicity that would have vanished, had her real feelings been avowed. It was long since Mr. Fielding had heard the melody of Julia's voice; and its sweetest tones were now drawn forth for his renewed delight. She sang, without one exception, all those favourite airs, which none but her had ever breathed so well. Even in the *ariette*, which the Countess Montalvina had executed at the Duchess of Chester's, Julia surpassed herself, although Lionel's dark eyes were fixed intently on her countenance. Mr. Russel mentioned the Venetian *barcarole* which he had heard Lady Harriet Moreton sing, with Lord Calvert, at Hauteville; and Julia, at Fitzosborne's particular request, gave its simple harmony unequalled grace. It was a hard trial. But the evening closed at last, and Julia retired, happy in the consciousness of having done her duty; whilst Fitzosborne again exulted in the triumph of his own victory.

A day or two afterwards, Lord Alton and Mr. Fielding were walking together up Harley Street. They were, in fact, returning from Lord Alton's lawyer; and had preferred a circuitous and comparatively unfrequented road, when their attention was attracted by a little group of a man and a woman, who held in her arms a lovely boy of about three years old. The seniors were gazing about, as if ignorant of the way; whilst the child, delighted at his novel situation, stared, shouted, and pointed at every dog or vehicle that passed.

"How strange it is," said Lord Alton, "that there should still exist so marked a difference between English and Irish people. Now look at those three people yonder; it is impossible to mistake them for any thing but Hibernians; and yet there is nothing *outré* in their dress, and we have not heard them utter one word."

"That black-thorn stick would guaranty a Paddy anywhere," said Mr. Fielding, as he passed them—partly addressing Lord Alton,

and partly apostrophizing the sturdy owner of the ponderous bludgeon.

"Is it the switch that yer honours would be after putting the spake on?" said Barney M'Clane, with a proud flourish of his valuable property: for it was he whom Mr. Fielding, unknowingly, accosted.

"A capital switch, indeed," replied the Rector, laughing, as, somewhat sideling against the iron rails, he evaded the utmost verge of the circle, which Barney was dexterously describing with it in mid air.

"Well, then, them there is the gentlefolk that wouldn't be after putting poor bodies astray, barring they were on a wrong road, honey," observed his companion, Judy, who, meanwhile, could scarcely hold the animated boy, as he seemed at every instant ready, in the exuberance of his innocent joy, to leap from her sheltering arms.

Barney took the hint; and following the gentlemen, with his hat held fast by both

hands, he exclaimed, "Long life to yer honour; may I make bould just to ax a question?"

Mr. Fielding, believing him to be merely soliciting charity, threw him a shilling, and still continued his conversation, without paying further attention to Barney. But he, however, was not to be so easily foiled: with a knowing wink to Judy, he exclaimed, as he held up the shilling, "Here's what will make them mind me, any how;" and then running up to Mr. Fielding, he touched his elbow, and making him a sort of inclination between a bow and a scrape, "Yer honour," said he, "has dropped this hog."

"Well, you may keep it, my good fellow, only leave us."

"Long life to your honour, and I'll drink it to your honour's health, if I knew your name—no offence. But might I make bould for to ask, where a poor body like me could get justice in London?"

"I think the man is mad!" said Lord Alton,

whose attention was now attracted by the energy of Barney's manner, and the vivacity of his countenance.

"Is it mad I'd be, for looking after justice in London?"—and the shrewd, sidelong glance from under Barney's bushy eyebrows at once invalidated the charge.

Lord Alton's curiosity was excited. "What kind of justice do you want?" inquired he, wishing really to assist poor blundering Paddy.

"Och! only a common justice; one that I'm ready to pay for, your honour; for haven't I an iligant three-and-fourpence in my pocket, let alone the thirteen from his honour, long life to him."

"You ought to go to a police-office," said Mr. Fielding.

"Well then, that's for all the world what every one's telling me; but sa'ar a one would show me the way, no more than if it was the road to heaven—God bless us!"

"If you turn to the right, at that corner, and then to the left, you will soon get into Oxford

Street, and then inquire for Marlborough Street."

"'Faith, and it's many a turn a man may take before he'll get out an oath," answered Barney, bowing and scraping his thanks; but as he looked to the corner to which Lord Alton pointed, and which they had now nearly reached, his countenance suddenly changed; and putting up his hand to his brows to shade the light, he suddenly exclaimed, as in the energy of the action he rather threw than pointed his black-thorn stick in the direction of his falcon eye, "By the powers, Judy, if that's not Terry Simmons coming down the street, my name's not Barney."

"Then glory be to the saints!—and it's my Lord Tralee's man, sure enough; and it's he that will help us to our oath, any how."

Barney and Judy sprang forward simultaneously, to intercept their new acquaintance; who either was engrossed by his own thoughts and did not really perceive them, or, having recognised, endeavoured to evade them. But

so it was, that he turned off the flags at the moment Barney was crossing over to him; and as the latter, by a movement of equal tact and more celerity, placed himself directly in face of him on the pavement, the encounter took place directly opposite to the spot where Barney had left Lord Alton and Mr. Fielding still standing in astonishment at his impetuosity.

"Och, Jewel, and don't I see it's yourself? and wouldn't I know Terry Simmons's shock head north or south, if the beaver was ever so fine on the top of it?"

Barney struck his black-thorn stick firm in the ground, and at the same time held out his muscular weather-beaten fist; but whether as a simple action suited to the powerful style of his oratory, or with the still simpler intention of shaking hands in the open street with the well-dressed Mr. Simmons in his new hat, must ever remain a mystery—for the latter, starting back in unfeigned surprise, first looked almost indignantly at his interrogator, then glanced his quick eye to where Judy and the

child stood beside Lord Alton and Mr. Fielding.

The whole had passed rapidly; but the glance was instantaneous. It was, however, a moment on which an eternity might hang. Startled at perceiving Lord Alton, he lost for a moment his self-possession, and unconsciously acknowledged his own identity by raising his hat an inch or two behind, with that peculiar, but characteristic motion, which Lord Alton had formerly remarked in his mysterious informant. The next instant Mr. Simmons, under the pretence of replying to Barney's questions, stood with his back to the gentlemen, who now walked on in silence; unconscious how much the fate of those most dear to them depended on the four individuals whom they left behind.

Lord Alton had, with pleasure, remarked that the appointed day had long passed, without bringing with it the promised proofs of Lord Tralee's delinquency; and, more than ever anxious that his character should be redeemed, he had flattered himself, and almost persuaded

the minister, that the whole business had merely been a scheme to extort money, and that the continued silence of his Lordship's accuser was in every sense to be considered as absence of all proof against him. He had ascertained, by sending to the lodgings formerly occupied by Willis, that the man was actually dead; and his wife and family gone, nobody knew whither; for the landlord acknowledged that his claims against the widow were discharged to the uttermost farthing, and that consequently he took little trouble or interest in the affairs of a family, from whom he could himself expect no further advantages. Upon the whole, however, the little information which Lord Alton's messenger had extorted from this man, tended to refute his informant's assertions, rather than otherwise; for although his report of Willis's death had been confirmed, his observations respecting the poverty of his family were not in accordance with the prompt payment of all his debts, which further information was afforded by his quondam landlord.

Still, however, Lord Alton was by no means satisfied upon the question of Lord Tralee's guilt or innocence. His knowledge of the world was the result of talents united with experience; and he was aware that in policy, as well as war, success was often best insured, by grappling at once with apparent impossibilities. Scarce a doubt remained of Willis being in some way or other implicated in the fraud; and the only uncertainty was, whether he had acted as principal or agent. His having lived and even died in apparent poverty, was no proof of what proportion he had appropriated to himself of the booty; as a sudden change in his circumstances would have excited suspicion, and almost insured detection. Again, this posthumous and mysterious accusation of Lord Tralee, still unsubstantiated, might be merely a successful scheme on the part of Willis's family, to divert that investigation, which had commenced before his death; and the disappearance of the widow and children, under circumstances evidently the reverse of that

penury which the stranger had described, seemed still firmer to affix the stigma on Willis's memory.

But to Lord Alton's clearer penetration, the very same circumstances which, in one point of view, seemed to throw the crime beyond Lord Tralee, might, in effect, be but proofs of his still increasing turpitude. Had he discovered his betrayer, and bribed him to silence? for it was evident that the informer was any thing but an honest man: or had Lord Tralee himself withdrawn Willis's family into obscurity, and thus removed the only witnesses of his own misconduct?

Either of these was possible, even probable; and Lord Alton consequently held his judgment in an equilibrium, waiting for any evidence, even that of circumstance, which might turn the balance to either scale. It was not, therefore, without intense interest, that he had so unexpectedly recognised his informer, and discovered from Judy's exclamation, not only his name, but also that he held some confi-

dential situation in Lord Tralee's family. Further reflection recalled to his memory that he had accidentally heard, that Simmons was the name of his Lordship's secretary; and it was a singular coincidence, that the first time Fortune ever seemed to desert her favourite Fitzosborne, was that very evening, when Lionel apologised to Julia for not having executed some trifling commission, by saying, that, in order to insure its completion as he thought, he had intrusted it to his father's secretary; adding, with a laugh, "Simmons has been so long in my father's confidence, that he has become absolutely the fac-totum of the family; and though I myself saw the fellow to-day turn into Harley Street, he had the impudence to come back two hours afterwards and tell me he had forgotten it."

Little was Fitzosborne aware of the manner in which those hours had been employed by Simmons; and still less could he understand the look of intense anxiety with which Lord Alton gazed upon him, as he made this appa-

rently unimportant observation. He soon however forgot, in conversing with Julia, to speculate on either circumstance; and the evening passed with uninterrupted happiness to the successful and still triumphant Lionel.

CHAPTER X.

A SNARE.

Oh! many a shaft, at random sent,
Finds mark the archer little meant!
And many a word, at random spoken,
May soothe or wound a heart that's broken.

LORD OF THE ISLES.

THE next morning, Fitzosborne's slumbers were disturbed unusually early by the arrival of two important messages. The first was a note from his father, requesting his immediate attendance on a business of the utmost importance; and the second was the scarcely less

interesting information, that Mr. Barney M'Clane was waiting to see him in the drawing-room. Hastily answering his father's note, by saying that he would breakfast with him, he commenced the operations of his toilet without delay; and, dismissing his servant, desired Barney to attend him in his dressing-room.

A very peculiar expression marked Barney's countenance. It was not agitation; for never was the black-thorn stick firmer on the ground. It was not fear, for his tall commanding figure stood erect before Fitzosborne, as if almost he could have looked down upon him. Still less was it triumph, for the quick, unsteady glances—the start, when once Fitzosborne's officious valet appeared in the adjoining chamber—all indicated a mind not quite at ease. But still, Barney was stedfast in his purpose; and Lionel was too impatient for his ultimate decision, to waste much time in watching the changes in an old man's weather-beaten countenance.

"Well, Barney, have you thought of what

I was telling you the other day? What does Judy say to it?"

"Why, Judy says, your honour—but there's no knowing what she says betimes; for, saving your presence, I think she is fairly bewitched like about Nancy."

"What nonsense! have I not told you again and again, that I have made quite a lady of her; that she is as happy as a queen; and grown so fat and well that you would never know her?"

"And we that are breaking our hearts day and night for her!" exclaimed Barney, indignantly.

"Well, Barney, now I will tell you one word for all: I have been thinking what you said about seeing Miss Nancy; and I assure you that nothing would give me so much pleasure, as to take you and Judy to her."

"Well, then, the blessing of God be upon you, for its yez that rejoice all the cockles of my heart! If yer honour would but once let us see the hem of her petticoat—if it was even in the dark, or through the cranny of a door itself—

it's we that would go to the world's end, far and near, for your honour both here and hereafter."

"But, I am sorry to say, it does not rest with me. You know, Barney, as I have already told you, she is living now like a lady bred and born, with ladies of fashion and ladies of rank ——"

"Then it's herself that would cut them all out, and no blame to her." Barney accompanied this observation with a smart toss of his head a little on one side, a knowing wink with his right eye, and his under lip, at its conclusion, drawn up in the middle, till it entirely covered its twin brother, his upper lip.

"She certainly does eclipse them all; and you can't think how they all look up to her."

"Didn't I tell ye so?—didn't I tell ye so?" reiterated Barney, striking his stick triumphantly on the carpet: "she has lady written on her back, and sarra a better was ever before her."

"But then, Barney, you that are a sensible

man, must know, that in company of great lords and ladies, it would hurt poor Nancy very much if she was put in mind of Ballyfoyle Bog."

"And it's I that would'nt hurt a hair of her head, the cratur—that I wouldn't."

"I am sure you would not, Barney," (and Lionel spoke in his softest voice); "but you know, as I was saying, if any of her great friends were to see her speaking to you or Judy——"

"Then it's not myself that would have the heart to speak to her, when I'm after going to swear away her character, as one may say. Och hone! and she my own sister's child! But saar a one of her frinds, big or small, can be kinder than we were till she left Ballyfoyle, and would have been after, if she had stay'd wid us."

"However, Barney, as we cannot help what's past, and as Nancy will not consent to see you, for the reasons I've given you——"

"And it's she'll not consent to see them that has rocked her in her cradle, when she hadn't

one to sleep in; and gave her bit and sup, when they had nothing for her? Och! Och! and if that's not having the notes for unkindness, it's a wonder! But saving your presence, your honour, I don't believe it for all that."

"I assure you, Barney, the very last time I saw her, she told me herself she hoped you and Judy were well, but that she could not think of ever seeing you."

"Then, may the sight of her child go far from her!—may the babby she bore never smile in her face, and he never know her voice when he hears it!—and when she is dying, may her sheet be straightened, and her wake be kept, where there is none to wail over her! for many a night have we wailed for her, and many a long mile have we come, only to look on her; and now for her to misprize us, and turn her back on us, when we didn't go near her at all, at all; nor ax'd her so much as for the price of a salt herring; and has not the heart to do that same; and she the daughter of my own sister:

no blame to her, that sat at my fire many a day, when she hadn't kish or creel of her own—God help her!"

"It's all very true, Barney," continued Fitzosborne, who, intent on his own plans, had scarcely attended to one word of poor Barney's lamentation; "and as you perceive Nancy is *determined* not to see either you or Judy, I think it is useless for you ever to come after her to England again——"

"And this is the third time we comed over, on our bare feet, every step of the way, by land and by sea; and she to look down upon us, when we were not even in sight of her, and sarrah a harm it would have done her; but it's the better she'd been for it; and hasn't one token of her to take back, to show she was in it, barring the money we leave behind us for our three stone of oatmeal a day, and dry lodging at night; and it's may be the sight of us might be good for sore eyes wid her, nor ever she's dead yet."

"And so to come, as I said, to the point, have you made up your mind to take that oath I spoke to you about?"

"Then it's myself that had hardly the heart to do that same, till I heard of the maram's airs upon us. But now, I don't care if I take the cabin, and potato-garden, and farm, your honour offers me at Ballyfoyle, at the rent your honour mintioned—and that's no rint at all, at all."

"I didn't say any thing about its being at Ballyfoyle, or the Giant's Causeway, or any where in particular; for, how do you know, Barney, it might not be in America?"

"Och, then, and it's not Barney M'Clane that would go to America, barring I was exported there by law; for it's not out of Ireland I'd like to die, any how."

At this interesting point of the debate, another summons from Lord Tralee urged Fitzosborne no longer to delay his presence in Portman Square. He was unwilling to neglect a request of such unusual urgency, and still more

unwilling to lose so favourable an opportunity of concluding his bargain with Barney M'Clane; for he perceived how powerfully he was affected by Lionel's assurance of Nancy's ingratitude, and he feared lest any untoward circumstance should intervene to destroy those feelings of resentment, which he had so well succeeded in exciting. He knew how little it was in the character of Barney to yield a point, such as that of living in Ireland in preference to America; as it was evident that both interest and prejudice combined in favour of the former, and as it was comparatively unimportant to Lionel where the old couple spent the short remainder of their days, provided England was never again made their scene of action, he determined to conclude the bargain on their own terms rather than run the risk of the contract being finally broken off.

A confidential servant was, therefore, despatched to Barney's lodgings, with a hackney coach for Judy, in order to save time; and with strict orders to bring back a Catholic prayer-

book, and to leave the child behind; and in the mean time Fitzosborne drew out two papers for their mutual signatures.

The paper Fitzosborne allowed Barney M'Clane to dictate with every apparent frankness on his part; taking, however, his chance for any irregularity or want of form that might appear in it hereafter. Barney was, however, sufficiently acute to bear even this insidious test, and an agreement was accordingly drawn out and signed by Lionel, pledging himself to "pay the rent, tithes, and taxes of the cabin and farm on Ballyfoyle Bog, now held by Barney, with three pounds a year for repairs, during the natural life or lives of said Barney M'Clane, and Judy his wife," &c. &c.

The other paper was not less carefully worded, and run nearly as follows:—

"Whereas, on or about the month of——, in the year of——, certain circumstances and events occurred in a cabin on Ballyfoyle Bog, then held and inhabited by Barney M'Clane, Judith his wife, and a young girl named Nancy

Jones, niece to the said Barney M'Clane: in which circumstances above alluded to, the three aforesaid persons, viz. Barney M'Clane, Judith M'Clane, and Nancy Jones, together with two other persons, of whom the Honourable Lionel Fitzosborne was one, were principally concerned and interested :—Now we, the aforesaid Barney M'Clane, and Judith his wife, do voluntarily make oath and swear, that we, henceforth, never will reveal what those circumstances may have been; whether for bribes or threats; in sickness or in health; at confession or mass; or on our death-beds. And further, we do voluntarily swear, never hereafter to discover or mention, or give any means of discovering who are the parents of the child known by the name of Charles Jones, whom we have bred and nursed to this day; nor the name of the fifth person who was engaged, as aforesaid, in the circumstances above alluded to, which took place in our cabin on Ballyfoyle Bog, on the said day of ——, in the year of our Lord——"

After many revisions and alterations, Fitzosborne, at last, flattered himself that this paper, if once sworn to, would for ever put him out of the power of either Judy or Barney M'Clane. Meanwhile, however, he renewed his efforts to persuade Barney to emigrate to America; but, on this point, all his eloquence was ineffectual.

"And it's not the likes of us, yer honour, that is ever for leaving ould Ireland," replied Barney, with some truth. "It's them that has money to carry wid em that's for going off wid it; but it's bad enough for us to get our bit and sup on the land we were born in; and who would give us so much as a coffin if we were after living any other where?"

At last, the arrival of Judy put an end to her husband's harangue.—Grief and hardship had made a visible change in her appearance since Fitzosborne had last beheld her at R—. But Judy's looks were always dependent on her spirits, like those of most of her countrywomen, the change of her countenance might have been,

in a great degree, attributed to the alteration in her feelings towards her former favourite Lionel. Her loquacity had given place to a morose taciturnity; and whilst he was reading to her the paper he required her to sign, she regarded him, not with the open good-humoured looks of kindness, with which she was wont to greet him, but with a dark scowl, indicative at once of distrust and indignation; whilst the peculiar manner in which one corner of her mouth was drawn down, might have been construed into either derision or defiance.

"There now, Judy," exclaimed Barney, as soon as the lecture was completed, "you see his honour gives us the cabin and taty-ground without any rint or condition whativir, long life to him!"

"And it's may be," said Judy, "the day may come yet when its roof will be shelter to poor Nancy, God help her!"

"Och, Judy, let her alone, I tell ye let her alone for that; for haven't I that to tell of Miss Nancy, you'll never believe, sure enough;

but it's no matter. But may be she'll be glad when Barney M'Clane darkens her doors again.—Why, isn't she grown a fine lady? and when his honour tould her we were in it, didn't she turn up her nose and say, that she hoped we shouldn't be after going forenent her, to boder her?" and again Barney struck his black-thorn stick vehemently upon the ground, whilst fire seemed to flash in his eyes. Judy, at first, listened to him in silence; but then slowly shaking her head incredulously, she replied—"Then, Barney, if my own Nancy is gone past herself that a way, the Lord forgive them that has worked up the change in her! for it was not her own heart spak them words, any how—nor may be her own lips either, God help her! But what are we standing here this minute for, and the babby crying at home for the only frinds he has left on God's earth, and they taken away from him? and he, the darling, that never did harm to man or baste—and saar a one but two has he to look after him, and that's Barney and myself, and another; and

and that's God Almighty. But it's not him that will starve while Judy M'Clane has a foot or a finger; and may the Lord see him righted!—Amen!—and his mother beside him."

Fitzosborne by no means approved of the turn the conversation had taken; and having again recalled Judy's attention to the papers he held in his hand, and obtained from her a somewhat sulky "Yes, yer honour," in answer to his inquiry was she ready to sign them? His confidential valet was called in as a witness; and the testament, with a cross on the cover, being produced, Barney and Judy took the required oath; and both papers were executed with every formality which Lionel's fears could suggest as making them more binding; nor, as he gaily locked up the valuable document in his writing-desk, and hurried off to his father's, did he hear any further observation from either Judy or her husband, except an equivocal prayer from the former, that "God might reward his honour, as his goodness *desarved*."

Elated with the success of all his schemes;

proud of the manifestation of his own superior talents; and excited by the hopes of future aggrandisement, Fitzosborne proceeded to Lord Tralee's; but on his arrival there, he found his Lordship in a far different temper from his own. He was walking up and down the room—his arms folded—his brows contracted—his lips compressed, and apparently seeking a fair opportunity of venting the accumulated wrath of which the swelled veins in his forehead gave ample testimony.

"I sent for you two hours ago.—Did you get my message?" Such was his uncourteous salutation of his son. Lionel apologised for not having immediately attended to it, by mentioning his having been detained by business of the utmost importance.

"Possibly your business was not more important than mine, Sir.—My fate is at hand; and it is possible, also, that your destiny may hang on mine."

"I don't understand you, father: for God's sake explain yourself!"

"The explanation is short.—The excise business is discovered."

"Discovered!—by whom?"

"That scoundrel Simmons. The question is, what are *we* to do with him?"

"The first point to ascertain is, how far are *you* in his power?"—(It was remarkable with what strong emphasis the father and son each marked the pronouns *we* and *you*.)

"You know the case is this:—The Duke gave me full directions respecting that measure; and to carry those directions into effect, it was necessary that I should forward them to Willis."

"I should have supposed that you could have employed Willis, without parting with so valuable a document as the Duke's instructions: of course they were in writing?"

"Why, not exactly. The Duke gave me his authority, generally, by personal communication. But as Willis, who was always a sturdy fellow, refused to act upon any thing short of written authority, I gave him, entirely

to satisfy his scruples, a letter, which I had formerly received from the Duke, and which was in its tenor exactly in accordance with the instructions on this subject, which I received myself from his Grace verbally."

"I see no great harm in this, provided there is nothing in your Lordship's own hand-writing that can criminate you."

"Ah! there's the misfortune!—that villain, Simmons, who now, I verily believe, acted on a deliberate plan of treachery throughout, played the part of negociator between me and Willis; with whom, for a variety of reasons, I did not wish to have much communication myself. Simmons brought me word that Willis would do nothing in the business, without having distinct instructions. I accordingly wrote to him, and, of course, gave the Duke's letter as my own authority. I then desired that fellow Simmons to enclose a copy of the Duke's letter; but he, either by design or accident, sent him the original."

"How very imprudent!" exclaimed Lionel,

without much commiseration for his father's evident distress.

"I told you at Elm Park," continued his Lordship, after a painful silence of some minutes, "I told you that I had sent to Willis to recover both these documents, and that he refused to give them up, saying, that he kept the Duke's letter out of consideration for his Grace, and mine for his own safety."

"All that is an old story," interrupted Lionel petulantly. "I know by threats, or bribes, or some way or other, that you got the Duke's letter out of Willis's hands, and by my advice showed it to Lord Alton. But what's become of your own letter, my Lord?—that's the point."

"When I went to Willis, he was lying on his death-bed; pale—emaciated—his eyes sunk—his forehead damp. Oh! it was a fearful sight! His wife, almost as pale as he was, silent, composed, and sitting absolutely on his bolster, holding his head on her knee. Then the children, Lionel;—the eldest boy held a cup of

something—cold water, I believe—to his father's clammy lips: but what between the child's hands trembling, and his not seeing, I suppose for crying, he spilt it almost all; and the four little ones on their knees, at the other side of the bed, with their faces hid in the quilt; and the infant asleep in the cradle, so rosy and so unconscious of its misery. Oh! Lionel, never—never shall I forget that scene. What would I not give that I had not let him go to prison; and now what have I gained by having ruined him?"

"Nothing; if you have let your letter slip through your hands," replied Lionel, unmoved by his father's agony.

"I really was so unmanned by the wretchedness which I could not deny I had in part occasioned; and I was so fearful that the man would actually die whilst I was in the room, that I scarcely knew what I did, or what he said, when he gave me up the Duke's letter. But, now I remember, he said something of having not withheld my letter, which he adduced as a

proof that he bore me no malice. I thought the man's mind was wandering; and as I had got hold of the Duke's letter, I made the best of the way out of the house."

"*I* would never have left it, without at least ascertaining where my own letter was," observed Lionel, with a countenance almost of contempt. Lord Tralee was too much agitated to notice his son's reproof.

"Willis was not many days dead, when Simmons brought me a letter, as I understood, from his wife, saying, that the paper I wanted was in her possession; and that if I would pay a certain sum of money, it should be delivered up to my secretary, Simmons."

"Then have you got it?" impatiently demanded Fitzosborne.

"No—but *he* has, I am afraid; and now the rascal has had the impertinence to tell me that, unless I pay him the full value of it, he will denounce me to Lord Alton; and what then, Lionel, would become of your marriage with Lord Alton's niece?"

"It was now Fitzosborne's turn to participate in his father's misery: starting off his chair, he strode up and down the room, occasionally exclaiming, "rascal," "villain;" and at other times looking at his father with a countenance between rage and contempt. Meantime, Lord Tralee had seated himself at the table, his two elbows on it, and his face hidden with both his hands. At last Lionel recovered, in some degree, his usual composure: standing at the fire-place for a few seconds in silence, he seemed to make an effort to collect his thoughts, and then abruptly inquired—"When Simmons had dared to utter this threat?"

"For this last fortnight," replied Lord Tralee, "I have observed a great alteration in his manner towards me; and yesterday morning he made a new demand for an increase of his salary, but not in such a manner as either to raise my suspicions or my anger. However, last night, to my astonishment, he came and told me point-blank that he had been offered five

thousand pounds for my letter—that it was of more value to me than to any other person—that if I did not agree to pay him down more than that sum, he would, as I said, denounce me to Lord Alton:—said something, I know not what, about you; and, finally, said he would send to-day at one o'clock for my definitive answer. It is past twelve now, Lionel.—What would you advise me to do?"

Another silence ensued; which Lionel broke at last.—"Would to God, we could set a press-gang at the fellow. What a country this is to live in! I suppose England is the only place on the face of the earth, where one cannot defend oneself by sending such a rascal as this out of the way. We must get rid of him some way or other, if it was only by sending him for a week or two to a pauper mad-house."

Lord Tralee started: his eyes glared wildly on Lionel's face, as if to seek in his countenance some evidence that his ears had not deceived him. But no comment on his words could there be read. The sallow cheek betrayed no passing

flush—the broad and polished brow remained unmoved; but the falcon eyes gleamed with unmastered fury, as, sternly fixed upon his father's changing countenance, he seemed intent to read his inmost soul: by degrees, as Lord Tralee quailed more and more beneath Fitzosborne's eye, the look changed in expression, though not in force; the smile of contempt slowly curled the corners of his beautiful mouth; and at length turning towards the window, he seemed coolly engaged in watching the passengers that strolled beneath it.

"Simmons threw out hints of having you, Lionel, equally in his power;" and Lord Tralee uttered, or rather whispered, these few words in a broken hollow voice, as if afraid to trust the passing echo with his thoughts, and yet as if seeking additional motive alike for dread and hate. Fitzosborne turned abruptly round, as he exclaimed—"Me! in the power of Simmons! I defy him. But if I were you——"

"What!—what would you do?" inquired Lord Tralee, as he hastily approached his son.

"Appear to accede to his terms—find out his power of annoyance, and negociate with him till an opportunity occur of sending him, wherever that power would most effectually be neutralized."

"But, Lionel, if less coercive measures—"

"Oh! father, I only jested when I talked of press-gangs and madhouses;" and Fitzosborne laughed—but it sounded like the laugh of a hyena. "However, I see I can be of little use to you: the question is, I should think, whether you are in the man's power to the value of five thousand pounds. If you are not, I suppose you will defy him: if you are, I suppose you will pay him; provided you can be certain that the bribe will buy him, or provided you have no other means of getting rid of him. In any case, I see no way of so effectually assisting you, as by my marrying Miss Fielding, and becoming nephew to Lord Alton as soon as possible. So," continued Fitzosborne, taking up his hat, "I will proceed without delay to your solicitor's about the settlements."

Before Lionel reached the door, Mr. Simmons entered; and all three remained silent for an instant. Lord Tralee trembled, and looked towards his son; Fitzosborne, disregarding him, eyed Mr. Simmons from head to foot, as if he would have annihilated him with a look: whilst the latter, perfectly composed, bowed with an affectation of humility, which amounted almost to insult; and then stood erect, as if waiting to be spoken to, whilst a malicious smile played on his lip, and laughed in his scornful eye.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INTERVIEW BEFORE THE WEDDING.

———— Be not over exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils :
For grant they be so, while they rest unknown,
What need a man forestall his date of grief,
And run to meet what he would most avoid?

MILTON.

THE silence which immediately followed Mr. Simmons's entrance was first broken by him; who, perceiving that Lionel was about to leave the room, placed himself rather between him and the door, and, renewing the obeisance, which, under existing circumstances, was de-

cidedly impertinent, he addressed Lionel by saying, in a familiar tone, "I hope you are not going away on my account, Mr. Fitzosborne. I have no objection that you should hear every thing that passes between Lord Tralee and me; and besides, I have a word or two to say to you also."

"Lord Tralee holds what communication he pleases with his secretary; but *I* have nothing whatever to do with you, Mr. Simmons," replied Fitzosborne, with inexpressible disdain.

"Don't be too sure of that, my good friend," rejoined Simmons, with another irritating grin.

"Friend!—How dare you take such liberties with me, sir?—The man is evidently out of his senses," added Fitzosborne, turning to his father, as he changed his attitude of menace into one of utter contempt.

"Friend or enemy, as you please to make me; but relation I must ever be, so long as your mother remains first cousin to mine:" and Simmons's bitter smile distended to a still more bitter laugh.

"Mr. Simmons," hastily interrupted Lord Tralee, intimidated by his secretary's looks of defiance—"Mr. Simmons, our relationship has never been questioned: my former kindnesses to you have sufficiently attested it."

"Kindnesses! and what kindnesses have you ever shown me, that I have not earned to treble their value? Sir, you have despised me—ridiculed and spoken contemptuously of me before your servants, even at your dinner-table; where I, your relation—your benefactor, ought to have been received—ay, and welcomed. It is true, you paid me a pitiful salary; but my services might have claimed higher remuneration, even from a stranger."

"Well, Simmons, I have been thinking since yesterday of your demand for higher wages."

"Wages!—Ay, you are right; wages *is* the proper word. But *I* have been thinking since yesterday, too, and—"

"And I hope you have made up your mind."

"Not quite," interrupted Simmons, with

the most provoking leer.—"My good friend here—or I should say, the Honourable Mr. Lionel—the truly Honourable Mr. Fitzosborne—may perhaps assist me in my calculations."

"You are an impertinent scoundrel," abruptly exclaimed Fitzosborne, whose patience was now exhausted; "and if you calculate on intimidating me, as you have done my father, it is high time you should know that I both despise and defy you."

"Hard words, Mr. Fitzosborne—hard words; but I give you leave to reflect a little. Is there *no* subject on which you would avert investigation?—*no* occurrences you would wish to have buried in oblivion?"

"None, sir—none. I scorn your insinuations; and I repeat, that I defy your malice." Whilst Fitzosborne uttered these words, in a paroxysm of passion which he could not control, Lord Tralee, more cautious and more cowardly, hastily drew out his pencil, and wrote on a scrap of paper one or two words, such as

"secret service money"—"payment to Lafitte;" which he handed to Lionel, in order to remind him of such proportions of his own share of the public spoil, as might have passed through the accounts of their present antagonist. But Lionel as hastily tore the paper in atoms, and scattered the fragments on the floor.

"My Lord," rejoined Mr. Simmons, turning slowly towards Lord Tralee, "I beg leave to call your attention to what your son says; I should be sorry to feel hereafter that *I* ever caused the ruin of any man. But here Mr. Fitzosborne declares there is no subject—no circumstance on which his conscience is disturbed: of course, the hints—the *information* I have received, must be erroneous. You have defied me, Mr. Fitzosborne; once more, and for the last time, I give you the option to retract your words."

"Scoundrel!" reiterated Fitzosborne, as he dashed past the secretary: nor was it till after he had turned out of Portman Square that he

recollected the very peculiar expression of triumphant malevolence that marked the features of the inveterate Mr. Simmons.

But London is a curious world: under its smooth and glassy sea, how many tides and currents ebb without even a ripple to mark their course, or to disturb the uniform surface, that seems but the duplication of heaven itself. The day shone bright, as Fitzosborne turned from his father's door. The carriages rolled gaily past him, with their hammer-cloths and liveries and trappings of magnificence. The blue-striped awnings of the various windows shaded the hanging gardens that from the balconies shed their sweets promiscuously, and almost disregarded: whilst dandy equestrians and sharp-toed promenaders, and large bonnets and immeasurable somnambules, were seen crossing the streets in every direction, enjoying the passing hour of sun-shine, as if none had cause to weep within those walls, which seemed to them like lengthened lines of happiness and splendour.

Fitzosborne's spirits soon regained their usual tone of exhilaration: he cast from his mind all painful retrospection, and all melancholy anticipation; but this apparent inconsistency proceeded less from volatility than from triumphant vanity and imperturbable selfishness. That morning had, he calculated, insured his fortunes. Of all the wide circle of his associates—of the unknown and uncounted number of his enemies, Lionel Fitzosborne, though he trusted few, dreaded but one; and that one was Barney M'Clane, whom he considered he had for ever silenced: nor was this calculation formed on an erroneous estimate of the character of either Barney himself or his countrymen in general. An Irishman would resort to any subterfuge to avoid taking an oath which he considered disadvantageous to himself, or in opposition to even his slightest prejudices. But if once his repugnance to the oath is overcome—if either from conscientious or interested motives he is induced to take it in solemnity and truth, it is more sacred and binding to him than to any

other nation under heaven; and it is scarcely possible to imagine any incentive, on this side the grave, sufficiently strong to induce him to violate it.

In addition to these national characteristics —for they should not be called prejudices—Barney's individual character possessed some leading traits, which sufficiently justified Lionel's present security. Superstitiously observant of even the slightest of those forms of worship to which he was bigoted, he verily believed that martyrdom, both in this world and the next, would assuredly follow the violation of an oath taken on even the picture of the cross, though he could with difficulty credit any accusation of crime consequent on the violation of one sworn on the Testament itself, if that holy sign was not visible on its cover. Nor were his worldly calculations less favourable to Lionel's views. The cabin on Ballyfoyle Bog, and the seignory of his potato-garden, was an Utopia to Barney M'Clane; and he was convinced that their possession solely depended on his observance of

that oath of secrecy, which thus every principle urged him to keep thenceforward inviolably.

As to the declared enmity of Mr. Simmons, Fitzosborne regarded it with the same degree of contempt in which he had always held the man himself.—He at once defied and despised him: for their walk in life had been so very different, that Mr. Simmons could by possibility know little or nothing of Fitzosborne's private life. It was true, Lionel had shared in the spoil, of which his father was now accused; but that share had always passed to him through Lord Tralee's own hands; and nothing could be more easy than to plead ignorance, as to the source of his father's bounty. He determined, from that day forward, to seize every opportunity to drop insinuations before Lord Alton, confirmatory of this preconcerted plan; and in his cool speculations on futurity, it was even a matter of doubt with him, whether it would or would not be most advantageous to him, on his first entrance into public life, to take that opportunity of emancipating himself for ever

from his father, and to devote himself exclusively to Lord Alton's party, which he foresaw must eventually be pre-eminent.

Such were Fitzosborne's reflections, as, leaving Lord Tralee to bear alone the brunt of Mr. Simmons's malice, he hastened to his lawyer's, to accelerate, as much as possible, the marriage-settlements, which were already in a considerable state of forwardness: from that he visited his coachmaker's, and saw, with proud delight, the Fielding arms quartered with his own: nor did he forget all the various opinions in favour of *giraffe*, or *osagiste*, as the coachmaker officiously recommended each in turn, as "the most fashionable lining colour." But Julia had chosen "*cendres de la rose;*" and with ominous pertinacity, Fitzosborne insisted on having her travelling carriage so decorated.

Next to the settlements and carriages, of course, the choice of their town residence most occupied his attention; and, with a light step and joyous countenance, he hastened towards Lord Alton's, in order to hear Miss Fielding's

decision between Belgrave Square and the favourite sites of more ancient date. But upon entering the library, in which Julia was alone, he was surprised, and almost disconcerted, at the visible alteration perceptible in her countenance.

Miss Fielding was seated at a writing-table; two cases of trinkets lay open beside her.—The one contained the magnificent jewels that had been ordered for her approaching wedding; the other held all the various ornaments which, from time to time, Lord Calvert had sent her from abroad; and which, till that day, she had treasured, with all the enthusiastic care with which the weary pilgrim hoards the last relic which tells him of future happiness. Pale and dejected — her eyes red with weeping — one hand supporting her head, and the other hanging cold and listless over the arm of her chair, she sat so entirely absorbed in her own reflections, as not to notice the entrance of Fitzosborne, till roused by the sound of his voice, at which she almost shuddered.

"Thank God! dearest Julia, those tiresome settlements are nearly done at last," gaily observed Fitzosborne.—Two of our carriages are finished; and now—but you have been weeping, Julia:—for God's sake what is the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Miss Fielding; but in so low a voice, as scarcely to be intelligible.

"Do not those jewels please you, Julia?" rejoined Lionel, hastily glaring at the trinkets that lay on the table.

"Alas! they are too handsome for me—they are more than I desire or wish for. If you would allow me, Mr. Fitzosborne—"

"Nonsense, dearest girl," interrupted Lionel, kissing the hand that hung like the hand of death—"What can be too handsome for Miss Fielding—for *my* Julia?"

"If you would allow me, Mr. Fitzosborne, for once to open my heart to you.—I have no friend—no counsellor.—Alas! let me—let me tell you all I feel, and do you be yourself my judge."

"You can tell me nothing, dearest Julia, which I do not know already. But trust me, love, I better appreciate your merits than you do yourself; and were millions at my disposal, on you alone would I bestow them."

"You pain me to the heart, Fitzosborne: I am not—indeed I am not worthy of such generosity: I would fain deceive my own heart; but with you, I could never wish to dissemble for an instant. Our affections, Fitzosborne, are not always under our own control: mine, alas! were bestowed on another, long before I ever saw or knew you—Lord Calvert was the idol of my earliest years."

"That is an old story already, dearest Julia; and before we have been married ten years—nay, ten months—you will laugh at such reminiscences, as I do now."

"Never, Fitzosborne," said Julia, solemnly. "I esteem you; and I trust I am fully, deeply grateful for all your generosity: but do not let me deceive you, Fitzosborne. It is for your happiness, and my own justification, that

now, for the last time, I wish to speak to you on this painful subject." Her snowy hands now hid her burning blushes; whilst the tears forced their passage through the slender fingers that in vain assayed to arrest their course. But Lionel, though he looked at her in silence, beheld the anguish of his victim, unmoved in countenance—unchanged in purpose. What was the possession of Julia's heart to him? It was too pure—too generous for him to prize; and if the scene before him gave him a passing pang, he might, perchance, have forgiven it, in the consciousness of the advantage for the future, which Julia's present ingenuousness afforded.

At last, after a pause of some moments, he replied, "I feel, dearest Julia, all the value of the confidence you have placed in me; but do not let us mar the happiness of the present, by unnecessary reference to the follies of the past. There is not one woman in a thousand who marries her first love: and as to me—though I tell you, with truth, I never loved as I do now

—yet you cannot flatter yourself, Julia, that I have lived till my present age in a state of apathetic indifference. Come, come, my dear girl, let us reserve our mutual confidences till next year. At our fire-side, some winter's evening, we may tell love stories *à l'envi l'un de l'autre.*"

The tone of cool, unfeeling irony with which Lionel pronounced these words, at once restored Julia to herself. No tear now dimmed the lustre of her eye; and if her cheek still mantled with blushes, the hectic tinge was now the flush of pride. "I have already told you, Mr. Fitzosborne," continued she, "how long I have been attached to another; if, with this conviction, you can be satisfied with a divided heart——"

"Gladly and proudly do I accept the slightest portion of that heart, the whole of which Lord Calvert has rejected——"

"Rejected!—Yes—So long as I believed that I was Lord Calvert's choice, not all the purchase of this world could have bribed me to

marry any other man. But *you* tell me, Mr. Fitzosborne, he *has* rejected me. Is there no error—no misconception on this point, which might lead us both to future misery?" And as Julia said this, she fixed her dark eyes full on Lionel's face, as she thought of Lady Matilda, and of all her accusations of his duplicity. But Fitzosborne met her gaze unabashed.

"You have seen the evidence of his own hand-writing, Miss Fielding; I have no other to adduce."

Poor Julia for a moment sunk back in her chair; the next, in a still fainter voice, she added, "Forgive me, Mr. Fitzosborne; I know not what I say—scarcely what I wish. These trinkets were gifts from Lord Calvert; perhaps I have done wrong to retain them even until now; but henceforward I never wish to see them more: take them, Mr. Fitzosborne, and with them accept my assurance, that as you have chosen me to be your wife, it shall be the object of my life, at least to deserve your esteem——"

At that moment Mr. Fielding entered; and Lionel, with the self-possession which never abandoned him, turned towards him with his usual smile, and asked his assistance in persuading Julia to name an early day for the marriage. The kind father, unconscious of Julia's feelings, added his entreaties to those of Lionel, who knew well how to assume the manners of an impatient and disinterested lover; whilst Julia, sinking under hapless despondency, yielded to the arrangement which fixed their nuptials for the following Monday, believing that no further effort on her part could release her from a fate so apparently inevitable.

Satisfied with this confirmation of his hopes, and not unwilling to avoid a renewal of their previous conversation, Fitzosborne again took his leave triumphantly; and returning to his solicitor's, scarcely left his side till he saw the deeds of settlement completed, and ready for signature.

Meantime Julia, with treacherous composure, retired with her trinkets to her own apart-

ment: she neither sighed nor wept; and the calmness of her despair differed little in its semblance from the undisturbed tranquillity of contentment—like the ship which settles on the ocean a moment before it sinks, whilst it seems as undisturbed as on a summer's sea. The magnificent diamonds were listlessly displayed, as if in mockery of grief, whilst the humbler but more cherished gifts were carefully wrapped in different folds of paper, as if to be the more impervious; nor was it discovered till long afterwards, that the seal which Julia accidentally chose to impress upon the *paquet*, contained for an emblem a withered leaf, with the well-known inscription, "*Je ne change qu'en mourant.*"

CHAPTER XII.

PERPLEXITY.

Are we in life through one great error led?
Is each man perjured, and each nymph betray'd?

PRIOR.

EARLY the next morning Julia's slumbers were interrupted by the entrance of her maid, who was the bearer of a note to her from Lady Matilda Calvert, on the outside of which was written, "To be delivered immediately." With fluttered spirits and a fevered cheek, poor Julia received the billet, and some minutes elapsed ere she could summon sufficient resolution to

open it; for she felt an intuitive conviction, that its contents in some way related to Lord Calvert. But at last, with a kind of desperate defiance of misery, she tore open the envelope, and read the few following sentences.

"Dearest Julia,

"Oswald arrived last night. All is right, my best beloved Julia, or rather let me call you my best beloved sister. I was not wrong in my suggestions; Calvert has never ceased, and never will cease to love you. But why do I anticipate? All I meant to say was, that he implores you to allow him ten minutes' conversation with you to-morrow morning—he will then explain every thing—Fitzosborne's treachery—his own imprudence—but above all his unalterable attachment to you. Oh Julia! we may yet all be happy. Speak to your father, to Lord Alton, nay, even to Fitzosborne himself; but do not from mistaken delicacy or punctiliousness make all who love you miserable. Send word by the servant who takes this, when my brother may visit you. He is now beside me, and if

you saw his agitation, you would pity him. I hardly know what I am doing. God bless you, dearest Julia!"

What words can describe Julia's feelings, as she again and again perused these lines? She did not weep; it might have been better, had she done so; but a cold tremor crept over her frame, and the blood which so rapidly forsook her cheek, recoiled to throb with fearful palpitation in her bosom. At first, she scarcely comprehended the meaning of the letters on which her glazed eye rested; but at length the words, "Calvert has never ceased to love you," which she mechanically repeated almost aloud, brought some faint import to her mind. She paused: then slowly passing her hand across her burning brow, she again read the whole note through, and having finished it, she laid it to her bosom, and crossing both hands on it in an attitude of prayer, she exclaimed, as she turned her beautiful eyes to heaven, "Thank God! one sorrow is removed;" and then sinking back on her pillow, her long dark eye-lashes

lay on her alabaster cheek, as she communed in solemn meditation with that omniscient Spirit, who alone can support us in the various trials of this life.

Julia believed that her line of duty was a very simple one, and she soon persuaded herself that she had attained the composure necessary for its fulfilment. Throwing on her dressing-gown, she rose from her bed, and kneeling devoutly beside it, she again poured out her soul to him who despises not a broken and a contrite heart: and then deliberately answered Lady Matilda as follows:

"I will not deny, my dearest friend, that the tenor of your communication has been a solace to my feelings, which in some degree alleviates my affliction. But beyond the casual balm to my vanity which it has afforded, it cannot avail.

You ask me when I will admit your brother—my answer is, a wish that we may never meet again. You may tell him, I forgive him the bitter mortifications which what you call

his imprudence cost me; but that I am now betrothed to Mr. Fitzosborne, and as his wife, which I already almost consider myself, the sentiments of all other men must be to me a matter of perfect indifference. I have anticipated your suggestion of speaking to Mr. Fitzosborne, on the subject of past follies and past feelings; and I have now only to request, that hereafter they may never be alluded to between us. Adieu, my dearest friend! I had almost forgotten to tell you that Monday is fixed to be my wedding-day. Need I add that no change of name will ever alter the affection of

"Your Julia."

As soon as this answer was despatched, Julia finished her preparations for breakfast, and proceeded to the drawing-room as calmly as if unconscious of anxiety or grief. She had wound up her mind to the conviction that her marriage with Fitzosborne could not now be broken off without an imputation of caprice, and even, perhaps, of less defensible motives;

and thus, as she said, considering herself as already almost his wife, she endeavoured to dismiss from her mind all thoughts, all wishes, incompatible with the strictest duties incumbent on that character. At first, her determination in favour of Lionel had been supported by the dictates of wounded pride, with which her offended dignity had pointed all her reflections upon Lord Calvert's unmerited desertion of her: it was true she had now lost that bulwark to her resolution; but in losing it, she had also lost those bitter irritating feelings, with which every thought upon that painful subject had hitherto been accompanied; and if her fortitude had no other basis than that of uncompromising principle, it was perhaps strengthened as much as it was purified, by being rectified from all inferior motives.

At this trying period Julia had no resource but in the vigour of her own mind; Lady Matilda, from the peculiar delicacy of her own situation, as the affianced bride of Lord Alton, of course felt reluctant to paying frequent visits

to his house; and an unacknowledged dread of meeting Lord Calvert equally deterred Julia from resorting, as she otherwise would have done, to St. James's Square: Lady Ellesmere's thoughts were solely engrossed by the nuptial preparations, in which those for Julia's marriage were scarcely less important to her than those of her own daughter; Lord Alton, as might naturally be supposed, spent all his leisure hours with Lady Matilda; and Lady Louisa divided her attention as equally as possible between them all, not excluding even Mr. Russel. Mr. Fielding was entirely occupied with lawyers and bankers; and with the more distant connexions of the Fielding family, Julia had hitherto held little intercourse; for as Lady Harriet Moreton had quarrelled with nearly all her relatives, of course Miss Fielding, whilst immediately under her guardianship, had no opportunity of cultivating any new intimacies in their circle; and even in the few casual visits which she had received from Lord Tralee's family, she had sufficiently understood their

characters to be aware that but little friendship, and no congeniality of mind was ever likely to subsist between them.

Thus Julia was, as it were, isolated in the midst of all this world calls happiness; young, rich, and beautiful—living in a scene of magnificence beyond the reach of common destinies; the daughter of a noble house—betrothed to one, her equal in rank, and like herself, the favourite of fortune. How many at that moment looked with envy to the lone sufferer, who found the best consolation for her unpitied sorrows in an innate conviction that they would not be of long duration! How blind, how vain is man! If it were possible to know the secret griefs, the daily trials, the blasted hopes of those, who to us seem to track their way in light, high as heaven's arch above the woes of mortality, alas! whom should we envy? whom dare we despise?

But Julia suffered not alone. There was one, and only one, whose bosom echoed every pang of hers. Lord Calvert was on the bor-

ders of Scotland when Lady Matilda's last letter reached him: it was the one in which she so far explained the reason of her anxiety to see him, as to mention, that Julia Fielding's happiness was, perhaps, dependent on his immediate return. Time and space were, to his mind, annihilated by that single word; and, travelling night and day, he reached St. James's Square in a state of agitation so excessive—so unusual, that his anxious sister was alarmed lest her desire to promote his happiness might have almost endangered his life.

In the first hurried moments of confidential explanation, perhaps Lady Matilda betrayed, too unguardedly, the secrets of Julia's heart, which she had herself extorted with such difficulty. But the conflicting passions which her recital excited in Lord Calvert's breast were almost too violent for control. At first, he obstinately refused to credit Lady Matilda's assurances that, at least, Miss Fielding felt no prejudice against him; and in proportion to his gradual conviction, that at one time she deci-

dedly preferred him, was his bitter and uncontrollable regret at that folly and impetuosity which had ultimately occasioned the wreck of so much happiness.

The greater was his wish to be convinced of Julia's attachment to him, the more assurances of it did he require; and as the vehemence of Lady Matilda's assertions rose with every objection suggested by his wounded feelings, he even prolonged his apparent doubtfulness for the happiness of hearing them so powerfully refuted. At last two points absorbed every other thought.—The first was, to obtain an immediate explanation from Julia herself; and the second was, to wrest from Fitzosborne all the satisfaction which he could now render for the unpardonable injuries he had dared to inflict upon him.

It is more easy to conceive than to describe the agitation of Lord Calvert's mind during those wakeful hours which passed between the moment of writing Lady Matilda's note at night, and the receipt of Julia's answer the following morning. But when he read Miss

Fielding's reply, the coldness of its expressions fell like ice upon his heart. Silent and motionless, he stood for some moments like one petrified; and then, turning to his sister, he exclaimed, with a bitter smile, at the same time holding out his hand to her affectionately, "I told you, Matilda, that your wishes misled your judgment: Miss Fielding is, as she ever was, indifferent towards me. Had it been otherwise, Fitzosborne should have answered to me with his life; and even as it is, if it was not for the sake of Julia—of Miss Fielding I mean—"

"Oh! Calvert!" hastily interrupted Lady Matilda—not aware of that impending danger which some of his incoherent expressions the night before had vaguely intimated—"Oh! Calvert! think of the misery any violence on your part might entail upon us all; but upon me in particular—Lord Alton—"

"Think, Matilda!—I must not—dare not think!" and, striking his clenched hand against his forehead, he strode up and down the room in irrepressible emotion.

"We know not, Calvert, whether Fitzos-

borne is yet so much to blame. You acknowledge that you disclaimed all attachment to Julia; and who knows—perhaps I have been myself mistaken—that Julia may not have that attachment for you which my own partiality for you may have led me to think inevitable."

Lord Calvert stopped: for a few minutes he gazed almost unconsciously in her face; and then, seeming slowly to collect his thoughts, he replied, with more deliberation in his manner—"Yes, Matilda, I am afraid we have both deluded ourselves by our wishes—Julia never loved me. You *were* deceived.—See here are her own words—a wish never to see me more. In that, at least, I can obey her. As for me, not even as Fitzosborne's wife, can I ever cease to love her. She was, Matilda, the day-star of my life.—Honour—fame—all would I have sought for her; but they can never, never, be enjoyed without her. However, when I am far away, exiled from my country and my family, my name shall reach her from the farthest lands. She may not, perhaps, regret

me; but at least she shall remember me. And now, Matilda, love, farewell! Say any thing you like for me to my father and mother; and kiss Louisa for me. I cannot stay in London. God bless you! and make you as happy as you deserve;" and so saying, he kissed her cheek, and hurried out of the room.

Lady Matilda made no effort to detain him. Knowing his character as she did, she was fully aware that his threats of vengeance against Fitzosborne were not the mere ebullitions of momentary anger; and dreading, as she did, their accidentally encountering each other, she almost rejoiced at Lord Calvert's determination to leave London; nor did she, for the moment, regret the tenor of Julia's note, however she felt surprised at its contents. Nevertheless, on re-perusing it, she recurred to her original conviction that Miss Fielding's apparent indifference to Lord Calvert was only assumed. She believed that her note was but an additional proof of her magnanimity, in sacrificing her feelings, to what she considered

to be her duty; and whilst she admired the fortitude which enabled her beloved friend to act thus nobly, she mentally confessed that in this instance, at least, virtue had gained its reward, as she felt intuitively convinced that, had Julia's answer been other than it was, nothing could have prevented a duel between Lord Calvert and Fitzosborne.

It was far more difficult to decide on what ought to be her own conduct under these distressing circumstances. She believed herself, as she was in truth, the sole possessor of a secret, on which the happiness of many depended. Notwithstanding all that had passed, she yet doubted not that the attachment between Lord Calvert and Julia was mutual; and if that were indeed the case, her marriage with Fitzosborne could be productive but of misery, as it could only be effected through the treachery of him who was to be her future husband; and the difficult question therefore to decide was, whether it would produce most unhappiness to allow her to marry a man thus devoid of principle,

or to run the chance that a discovery of his treachery might entail a quarrel between him and Lord Calvert, which to Lady Matilda appeared in that case almost inevitable. On the other hand, she considered it to be just within the limits of possibility that she had misunderstood Miss Fielding. Perhaps the excitement of Julia's feelings had arisen solely from mortification at the recollection of Lord Calvert's letter, unmixed with any tenderer sentiment;—perhaps, even, if her preference for Lord Calvert had once been decided, a change in her mind might have taken place, originating, no doubt, in the idea of his indifference towards her, but subsequently confirmed by her partiality for Fitzosborne, whose insinuating manners and cultivated talents even Lady Matilda acknowledged were superior to those of most other men.

In this dilemma, Lady Matilda looked round for counsel and assistance. At first, as in all preceding circumstances, her thoughts turned towards her mother, as her surest friend. But

Lady Ellesmere had so ingrafted her own mind on her husband's character, that she could not, on any such emergency, think or act unsupported by him on whom she had so long leaned, and on whose judgment she exclusively relied. To speak to her mother, therefore, Lady Matilda knew was but a circuitous mode of appealing to the Earl; and his interference, on such an occasion, promised rather to increase than to dissipate the embarrassment. At one time, she determined to open her heart to Mr. Fielding; but delicacy towards her brother deterred her from this step; and at last surmounting her own personal feelings of diffidence and doubt, she resolved to confide every thing to Lord Alton, as to him who was so soon to be alike her guide and her protector.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSCIENCE.

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.

SHAKSPEARE.

And all was conscience and tender heart.

CHAUCER.

IT is a trite observation, but one that is incontrovertible, that if once the direct line of rectitude be forsaken, there is no calculating on the devious paths in which we are likely to be bewildered. There, every succeeding step increases our danger; and whilst destruction impends at every moment, it becomes equally difficult to proceed or to retreat.

Such was the fate of Lord Tralee. The gold which it had already cost him so much to obtain, had not yet repaid him for the pangs it brought with it, ere its very possession urged him towards a precipice, from whence escape was scarcely practicable.

At the commencement of the unfortunate transaction, Lord Tralee's delinquency was known only to Willis. But no sooner did he feel himself in that man's power than, intimidated by the phantom which makes cowards of us all, he first distrusted, and then detested him; and thus, in his own feelings, anticipated that enmity which he most feared.

Willis was one of those common characters, who are obtuse to every feeling but that of kindness. Scarcely conscious of the value of the documents in his possession, he had at first merely required them for the common purposes of official regularity. Had Lord Tralee acted with either the courage or the ingenuousness of a clear conscience, he would himself have showed the letters to Willis, and thus confirmed

him in the idea of their being intrinsically unimportant. But Lord Tralee lost all moral courage when he lost his self-respect. Afraid of his own dependant, he sent the documents through the hands of his covert but bitterest enemy, Simmons, who at once saw the value of the prize, and retained Lord Tralee's own letter: thus constituting himself arbitrator of his destiny.

But even at this stage, had Lord Tralee dared to face Willis, he might have averted the danger. Kindness, or even common justice, would have won the regard of the poor man, who, feeling himself dying, naturally looked to his former patron as the future benefactor of his starving family; but Lord Tralee chose the course of intimidation, rather than that of mercy. Irritated first by doubt, as to the safety of his letter, and then by resentment, at its detention, he endeavoured, by accumulating Willis's pecuniary distresses, to force him to relinquish that, which was, in fact, no longer in his possession; whilst the real, but secret enemy

of his family wound his toils unseen and unsuspected, and artfully contrived, by exasperating the minds of both, to perpetuate their distrust of each other, and to prevent a personal explanation.

The death of Willis was partly occasioned by Lord Tralee's merciless persecution of him; but not so entirely as his Lordship's wounded conscience led him to believe. At first, he flattered himself that the possession of the Duke's letter was scarcely more valuable, than the certainty that this witness of his delinquency was for ever silent. But the memory of his victim's death-bed never left his tortured imagination. His clammy brow—his hollow eyes—the wife, still as the marble statue on a monument—the trembling boy, even to the sleeping cherub in the cradle, flitted like phantoms in his troubled thoughts, not less in the stillness of his midnight chamber, than in the glare of splendid revelry. To remove all trace of an unhappy family, and perchance to purchase respect from these harrowing visions, Lord Tralee had, by a calculating

generosity, paid the debts of the man he ruined; and provided a humble, but decent maintenance for the widow and her children.

This one act of beneficence, for a moment, stopped the torrent that was fast accumulating to hurl him to destruction. Here might have risen that rock of hope, which sometimes is seen to divide the stream of misery, and turn it towards that channel which leads to future peace. The persons employed by Lord Alton to verify the pending accusation, had lost all clue to Willis's family; and even Simmons had paused to consider, whether he could not gain more by saving Lord Tralee, than he expected from his destruction.

It has been said, that evil hunts the wicked to their overthrow. The bad genius of Lord Tralee beheld the momentary suspension of his destiny; and trembling for his prey, gave, in the treacherous counsels of Fitzosborne, the mortal blow that plunged him in irrevocable misery.

It was a fearful odds when Lord Tralee encountered Simmons. Both were devoid of

principle; and each had much to lose or win. But Simmons was a "bold, bad man;" and Lord Tralee trembled under the lashings of his own remorse. Had Lionel remained longer with his father at that interview, perhaps the stern, relentless tone of his unbending character might have supported his recreant parent, and taught their tyrant to submit. But no sooner was Fitzosborne gone, than Simmons triumphed: for Lord Tralee fatally vacillated between the insidious counsels given by his son, and the dictates of his own fears. Had he acted with determination, his fate, perhaps, might have been averted. Liberality might have won him —defiance might have awed him. But Lord Tralee was vain of his political ingenuity: he promised and prevaricated, and threatened and cajoled by turns; and the result was, that when Lady Matilda's message reached Lord Alton, he was in the act of dismissing the doubly guilty Simmons from his presence; who, having extorted a pitiful bribe from Lord Tralee, had come to the Earl to bargain for his ruin;

and having received from his unwilling hands the wages of his treachery, gave up all the documents, which more than confirmed his previous accusations of his iniquitous, but now miserable patron.

To conceive the embarrassment of Lord Alton's situation, it is necessary to consider the peculiarities of his character, in which the sensitiveness of pride was intimately blended with that delicacy of feeling, which renders its possessor painfully susceptible of even an implied censure; and now, it was scarcely possible for him so to act, under the existing circumstances, as to exonerate himself entirely from blame. It was well known in the political circles, that Lord Alton had reason to consider Lord Tralee as his personal enemy: if, therefore, he became his public accuser, or was in any manner accessory to his disgrace, the world would scarcely fail to attribute his conduct to the meanness of private revenge. On the other hand, the approaching union of the two families, by Fitzosborne's marriage with Julia, had long

been a matter of public notoriety; and the degradation which possibly might ultimately attach to his niece by that connexion, was a subject of poignant mortification to the Earl, though it, even in its very bitterness, afforded an additional argument for his not withholding the evidence of Lord Tralee's guilt, lest by an opposite, but not less plausible argument, his own enemies might attribute his forbearance to personal motives, varying, indeed, in their tendency, but equally contrary to the high and unbending principles by which he was uniformly actuated.

At last, after much painful deliberation, he determined on the only line of conduct which seemed at all likely to exonerate him from these contradictory accusations; and, unwillingly postponing his visit to Lady Matilda, he drove to the minister, by whom he was immediately admitted to a private and confidential interview.

It was a singular circumstance, that the fate of Lord Tralee was thus dependent on the two

men who, of all others, had most reason to consider him as their individual enemy. But to both the Duke and Lord Alton, integrity was dearer than revenge. The latter, with all the probity of an incorruptible judge, submitted to the minister, without reserve, the various papers that had been intrusted to him ; and even acknowledged, with equal candour and regret, the strength of the evidence which, on every succeeding examination, seemed to increase the delinquency of Lord Tralee. But having thus fulfilled his public duty, he exerted all his personal influence in mitigation of his punishment. With all the eloquence which might have given a senate laws, he pleaded the cause of him who, on a former occasion, had used every effort to compass his ruin ; and using to the Duke the same arguments which influenced his own mind, he finally prevailed on him to forego his original intention of impeachment, provided matters could be so arranged as to preclude the possibility of loss to the public. In other words, he obtained a promise from the minister, that Lord

Tralee should be allowed to retire from public life, without exposure of his guilt, on the repayment to the Treasury of the enormous sums which he had purloined, under circumstances of such aggravated delinquency.

Having thus obtained all that he could demand without infringement of the public rights, Lord Alton took leave of the minister, and hurried impatiently to St. James's Square; revolving in his mind, as he proceeded thither, the more than probability that his niece's fortune would in part be required to make good the deficiency in Lord Tralee's accounts, the full amount of which had not yet been ascertained. What then were Lord Alton's feelings, on hearing from Lady Matilda a suggestion that the marriage between Lionel and Julia, which in his generosity he had made so many sacrifices to promote, was in truth a measure replete with misery to the two individuals, whom next to herself he most valued, namely, Lord Calvert and his noble-minded niece. Still, however, fearful of acting with precipitancy in circumstances of such

peculiar delicacy, he determined to make the present situation of Lord Tralee's affairs an excuse for so far suspending the conclusion of the marriage-treaty, as to give Julia an opportunity of retracting, if it was her wish to do so, and at all events to lay fully before her the change in her future prospects which this discovery must occasion.

With this intention he returned home. The various occupations of the day had been so unavoidably protracted, that the dinner-hour was passed before he reached his house; and he therefore had only time to learn, in a few words from Mr. Fielding, that Fitzosborne, in his impatience, had so well succeeded in accelerating the lawyers and their deeds, that the settlements were actually in the house; and that Lionel, who was to dine there as usual, had requested that they should at least be read over, if not signed, that evening. Scarcely was this intimation concluded, when dinner was announced, and the *parti quarré* proceeded to the parlour.

The agitation of Julia's spirits had to all

appearance subsided: she sat as pale, it is true, and almost as fragile, as the summer's moonbeam; but her spirits wavered not, and the firmness of her mind supported her even when hope was gone. Lord Alton looked at her, from time to time, with intense anxiety. Not a word, not a sigh, gave indication of the conflict in her bosom; but the marble cheek, that not even a passing blush illumined, seemed rather to speak the tale of despair, than the fluttering wishes of a bride. Mr. Fielding thought only of the crisis now fast approaching, in the destiny of her in whom all his hopes of earthly bliss were centered. His eyes, occasionally suffused in tears, turned in anxious fondness alternately from Julia to Fitzosborne; and many was the fervent prayer the agitated parent mentally ejaculated for their happiness. But a flurried impatience, amounting almost to uneasiness, marked Fitzosborne's demeanour, far different from the usual imperturbability of his manner. The events of the morning were still unknown to him, and not one ray of light played

round the chasm which yawned at his feet; and yet a feverish anxiety marked his countenance, and palpitated in his heart, as if in prescience of approaching ill. His dark eye flashed as it rested on his bride, but its beam glowed with other fires than those of love. Not many hours had passed since he had listened to the confessions of her attachment to another; and whilst no passing flush had marked his emotions as he heard it, her words were traced indelibly on his memory. At one period, Fitzosborne might have truly loved Miss Fielding; but now that time was past, although the turmoil of his passions, compounded as they were of feelings almost demoniacal, rose to a height beyond control. Ambition, envy, fear, distrust—nay, almost hatred—rioted in his frenzied soul; and perhaps, could he have analyzed his thoughts, revenge itself might have been traced brooding in horrid anticipation of triumph over the mild and unresisting victim, whom already he fancied within his fiendish grasp.

When Miss Fielding rose to leave the room,

Lord Alton accompanied her to the door. "Will you, my dear Julia," said he, in a loud voice, intended to be heard by all—"will you give me a few minutes' private conversation in my study? You, gentlemen, will, I am sure, excuse my want of ceremony," added he, as Julia, trembling, without knowing why, stammered a faint assent, as she quitted the room. A few minutes, however, sufficed to restore her usual equanimity; and when the Earl entered his own apartment, he found she had already preceded him, and was calmly waiting whatever intelligence he had to communicate.

Taking her affectionately by the hand, he proceeded, in the kindest and most delicate manner, to inform her of all the circumstances attending the discovery of Lord Tralee's guilt; simply relating the particulars, without making any comments on the facts he stated; and only interrupted occasionally by those ill-suppressed exclamations, which, from time to time, burst unpremeditatedly from Julia, in her first emotions of horror and surprise.

In these, however, Lord Alton, with all his penetration, could discover no indication of her real and more personal feelings. It is true, no sentiment of pity for Fitzosborne individually, or eager exculpation of him from any possible participation in his father's delinquency, bespoke that energetic regard which starts forward involuntarily to commiserate or exculpate the individual whose interests are dearer than our own. In vain did the Earl look for one passing sigh; one proud denial that might have convinced him that she wished not to be convinced. But, on the other hand, all exultation, all expression of pleasure, were equally indiscernible. She listened, evidently with the most intense interest; but her judgment seemed only called forth to decide upon the action, without reference to the actor; and Lord Alton found, from whatever cause he knew not, that he was still as much at a loss as ever in regard of her real feelings towards Fitzosborne.

Determined, however, to let no trifling obstacle impede his anxious wishes to insure her

happiness, he thus proceeded, after a momentary pause—"And now, dearest Julia, it is for you alone to decide how far this alteration in Lord Tralee's circumstances may influence your own wishes, as to a change in your present plans. At this moment, your future destiny is in your own hands—you alone are to decide it."

Julia's heart throbbed till its pulsations were almost audible; the hectic blush again glowed on her cheek; and, for an instant, the fire of hope danced in her flashing eye. But a moment after, it sunk in tears; and, with a trembling voice, she slowly articulated, "Dearest uncle, how ought I to decide?"

"Ask your own heart, Julia.—If you find in it any preference for another than Fitzosborne, or any regret at the engagements you have already entered into with him, there is now a fair opportunity of cancelling them at once." As the Earl's penetrating eyes rested on Julia's countenance whilst he spoke, her own were timidly withdrawn; the blush, too, faded from

her cheek. But a circle of livid whiteness surrounded that mouth, which once seemed the very throne of joy, though now it quivered in the tremulousness of mental agony. She could not speak; and her breathing was almost a convulsive gasp, as she thought of Lady Matilda's note, and all the happiness it seemed to offer her: still, however, her first anxiety was steadily to pursue the rigid path of duty, be its direction what it might. And at last, collecting all her fortitude, she replied, with as much calmness as she could assume, "But, my Lord, do you not think that as I allowed those engagements with Mr. Fitzosborne to be entered into whilst his family were in prosperity, if I now cancelled them the world might attribute my conduct to motives unworthy of my character?"

The Earl for a moment looked at his niece with admiration, as she thus echoed the sentiments of proud and inviolable integrity, which had ever been the influential principles by which he himself was actuated. "I acknow-

ledge," continued he, "that the world in general, as it is ever prone to censure whenever an opportunity of blame occurs, might, in ignorance, attribute any change in you to interested motives; but then, Julia, we are not born to be the slaves of public opinion; it is sufficient if we merit the approbation of our own consciences."

"I feel," said Julia, with a sigh, "that I never could be happy, if I even seemed to deserve the censure of the world. I am indifferent to its applause; but I should shrink from its condemnation."

"And yet, Julia, recollect that the decision you are about to make, involves the happiness or misery of your future life."

"It is, therefore," replied the magnanimous girl, "more necessary that I should make that decision on the immutable grounds of sound principle. Do you think, Lord Alton, that Mr. Fitzosborne is, in any way, implicated in the misconduct of his father?"

"Nothing of that kind has yet transpired," rejoined the Earl.

"Then I am afraid—I mean, that if Mr. Fitzosborne is innocent—I have no right to magnify the misfortunes of one who was willing to share his prosperity with me. If I were now to desert him, perhaps my doing so might cast an additional obloquy on his character which he does not deserve."

"Certainly, my charming niece, in losing you, he would lose what scarcely the world could repay: nay," continued he, as he perceived her intention of interrupting him, "you need not disclaim my flattery, as you call it; I mean, even in a pecuniary point of view. You know I told you Lord Tralee's escape from impeachment can only be insured by the immediate reimbursement into the Treasury of all those sums of which he has defrauded the public; and it is but candid to add, that, as far as I know of Lord Tralee's circumstances, that reimbursement cannot be made without

the appropriation of a great part, if not the whole of your fortune."

"Alas! then it is but the more imperative on me to confirm these engagements, rather than to cancel them;" and now, scarcely able to conceal or subdue her emotion, she covered her face with both hands, as her head reclined on the back of the couch on which she sat. Lord Alton gazed for some moments on her in silent astonishment, and then slowly added

"You speak, Julia, only of duty: are then your inclinations at variance with your principles? or do you really prefer Mr. Fitzosborne to all other men?" Julia remained still silent; but a scarcely audible sigh burst from her labouring heart. Lord Alton perceived her distress, and resumed——

"There are many other candidates for your hand, Julia; and some even may have felt a preference for you, which the publicity of your engagements with Mr. Fitzosborne has alone prevented their declaring. Lady Matilda Calvert has even told me——"

At that name, Julia started from her recumbent posture. The blushes of sensitive modesty passed rapidly over her cheeks, her neck, nay almost to her fingers' ends; but still she fixed her eager eyes upon her uncle's face, as if to discover by a single glance the whole extent of his information. In a few minutes Lord Alton continued—

"It is scarcely fair to ask my lovely niece to confide her secrets to one of our sex; but, dearest Julia, when I consider how much your happiness is at stake; nay, more, the happiness of one whom I already——"

"My dearest uncle," interrupted Julia, turning away her head, as if to conceal her blushes, but still, in the very bend of her neck, retaining all the dignity of conscious rectitude, "I will not affect to misunderstand you; nay, more, since you condescend to receive my confidence, I will offer it to you without reserve. I acknowledge, with tears of shame and remorse, that once I foolishly cherished a preference for Lord Calvert; originating partly, if not entirely,

in an opinion of his sentiments towards me; which opinion, I was subsequently taught to believe, was erroneous: nor did I accept Mr. Fitzosborne's proposals until I was convinced that Lord Calvert could never be other to me than an indifferent acquaintance."

"But if Lord Calvert was now to *prove* his attachment to you, Julia?"

"It could not—it ought not to alter my situation with Mr. Fitzosborne. You have told me, my dear uncle, that he is innocent of the crime which has involved his family in poverty and disgrace—you have told me, too, that if I desert him, his ruin is inevitable: my line of conduct, as prescribed by duty, is therefore simple and indubitable. Neither you, my dear uncle, nor my beloved father, shall ever have to blush for my weakness, nor to apologize to a scornful world for a determination which my friends might call capricious, but which our enemies would stigmatize as both mercenary and ungrateful." So saying, Julia rose from

her seat, and for a moment Lord Alton gazed at her with equal pride and admiration.

"Generous, noble-minded girl!" he exclaimed at length, "thou art an honour to the name of Fielding: but does Mr. Fitzosborne know your former preference to Lord Calvert?"

"He does; and yet," continued Julia, in a hesitating manner, far different from her previous exaltation, "one circumstance, and one only, I have not communicated to him, though it is right that, considering our relative situations, I should have no secrets from my future husband; I this morning received this note from Lady Matilda," (which at the same time she drew from her bosom); "it certainly changes in some degree the ground on which I originally encouraged Mr. Fitzosborne's addresses."

Here the agitated Julia paused.—"It is, Julia," interrupted Lord Alton, "still, as I said before, at your option to break with Mr. Fitzosborne."

"No—not to ruin him," replied she, with a

mournful shake of her head.—"But who knows what change may take place in *his* sentiments, when he knows—" here her voice faltered, and she could scarcely add, in an under voice, "that I am undeceived?"

Even Lord Alton, the consummate politician, the experienced observer of human nature—even he, for once misled by hope, caught at the possibility of Fitzosborne refusing her, whom scarcely a diadem could ennoble:—"I will send him to you instantly," exclaimed the Earl, starting on his feet, with all the impatience of energetic friendship.

"Oh! no!—no!" exclaimed Julia, clasping her hands, and shuddering at the thought of speaking to Fitzosborne—"I cannot, indeed I cannot, see him now. But, dear uncle, perhaps you will deliver a letter to him from me:" and so saying, she took up a pen, and hastily wrote the few following words:—

"Do you remember our conversation of yesterday morning? Since then, I have had reason to change my opinion of Lord Calvert's

sentiments; and consequently the grounds on which my own resolutions were taken, are in so far altered.

"Thus much I have thought it right to say, in the spirit of that candour, which, I trust, has ever been my guide. But I must add, with equal truth, that the unfortunate intelligence communicated to me by my uncle, has in no degree influenced my sentiments; and that towards you they are, and ever must remain, the same.

"J. F."

If Julia had had leisure to deliberate on the choice of her expressions, perhaps her delicacy would have been startled, by the equivocal turn of her concluding sentence. But her only anxiety was to spare, as much as possible, the feelings of Fitzosborne; and to exonerate herself from any possible imputation of being actuated by mercenary motives. Having hastily concluded her billet, she handed it to Lord Alton for his approval; whilst her rapid change

of colour alone indicated her increasing trepidation. But the Earl returned it to her unread:—"I need not offer advice," observed he, with an approving smile, "where I can only praise. But tell me, Julia, definitively, what am I to say from you to Mr. Fitzosborne, relative to this melancholy change in the affairs of his family?"

"Simply, that the knowledge of those circumstances which are not attributable to him, can make no change in my sentiments," replied Julia, in a firm voice.

"Then you are determined to be his wife, notwithstanding all that has past?"—And as Lord Alton said this, his penetrating glance was even more impressive than the emphasis of his voice.

"Yes," answered Julia, "if the contents of that note make no alteration in his wishes."

Not a sigh—not a tremor fluttered in her voice, as, in a slow, steady, but subdued tone, Julia thus pronounced her own doom. Lord Alton gazed on her in silent admiration. "I will

now go to my father," added she, after a moment's pause. And as the Earl, in mute but impressive delight, gazed on her mild but unchanging countenance, he felt that it was almost profanation to commiserate a sorrow which was so proudly and so nobly borne.

At the same moment that Julia communicated to her father in the library the purport of Lord Alton's information, the Earl undertook the irksome task of acquainting Fitzosborne with all that had passed; but different indeed was the effect which this intelligence produced on the respective auditors.

The conflict, which, however repressed, still stirred in Julia's breast, between the renovated hope she scarcely acknowledged to herself, and the sensitive delicacy which shrunk from unnecessary crimination, gave an embarrassment to her manner, which, to the prejudiced eye of Mr. Fielding, bespoke only anxiety and grief. Impressed as he was with the conviction of her attachment to Fitzosborne, he attributed her evident agitation to alarm, lest the errors of

the father should prevent her union with him, whom he believed to be the free choice of her young heart. Eager, therefore, at once to remove the cause of her distress, the kind but mistaken old man impatiently interrupted her narrative by assurances, that what had occurred should not and ought not to interfere with their present arrangements. Julia's fortune was more than sufficient to repair any pecuniary loss Lionel might sustain; and what was the world, or all its miscalled vanities, in comparison with the happiness which resulted from the union of attached hearts and congenial dispositions! "I am rich enough for all," continued the generous parent. "And if I am allowed to see my Julia happy, what other comfort need I pray for on this side of heaven?"

Tears, the burning, scalding tears of mixed agony and gratitude burst from the almost broken-hearted Julia. She dared not trust her voice, lest she might destroy even the visions of hope, which now so brightly illuminated the radiant countenance of her venerated parent;

but she almost knelt to receive his blessing; and as they parted for the night, it was difficult to say which offered up the most fervent prayer for unnumbered blessings on the other's head.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VISION.

What beckoning ghost, along the moonlight shade,
Invites my steps, and points to yonder glade?

POPE.

PREVIOUS to the delivery of the message from Julia which summoned Mr. Fielding to the interview with her in the library already described, he had been engaged in his own room, in looking over the deeds of settlement which had that day been completed; and thus it happened, that on that eventful evening, to which Lionel had so impatiently looked for-

ward for the realization of all his hopes, he was left for some hours in a solitude to which he was at all times averse, and which now formed an ominous contrast to the gay anticipations he had previously indulged.

Nothing is more gloomy than a large London drawing-room imperfectly lighted; and Fitzosborne, engrossed by his own reflections, allowed, unconsciously, the different candles, one after the other, to wane in light, till at last the immense apartment seemed one vast space of "darkness visible."

Oppressed with unusual melancholy, he threw himself listlessly on one of the Grecian couches, to indulge in uninterrupted reveries. Such illumination as the candelabras on the chimney-piece still gave, fell in bold relief upon his forehead, and touched in fainter light the outline of his upturned cheek; whilst his dark and glossy hair, parted as it was upon his forehead, and the deep shadow through which the fire of his eyes was yet perceptible, altogether formed a study from which a painter

might have designed a head of Alcibiades. Intensity of thought sat on his polished brow, as if the lessons of Socrates were just then pondered; whilst the short, curled, and somewhat pouting lip gave a line of beauty which Aspasia's self might have commended.

But the tumult of Fitzosborne's thoughts was any thing rather than the lessons of philosophy. A painful and almost unaccountable melancholy weighed down his soul; and he turned, in vain, to the remembrance of Julia for consolation. He thought of her as he had first seen her in the library at the rectory—radiant in beauty, innocence, and joy; he remembered her even to the blush and smile with which she had listened to her father's praises of Lord Calvert; and he shuddered, as he repeated almost aloud that hated name. With the recollection of his first interview with Julia, came also the remembrance of Lady Harriet Moreton; their marked resemblance, his long-cherished attachment to his earlier love, and all the dreams of bliss and innocence that had

flown on the pinions of youth. But with the thought of Lady Harriet, came also the reflection, that he had that morning received a letter from her; and, tearing a crumpled paper from his bosom, he again perused it for the hundredth time.

It was incoherently written; but every line seemed traced in the fire that raged in the writer's bosom. When Lady Harriet Moreton had been in London, she had rather promoted than impeded Fitzosborne's union with Miss Fielding; and, however contradictory this may seem to any attachment she might have felt for Lionel, it yet proceeded from feelings and motives perfectly in unison with her general character.

Avidity of praise—which, in contradistinction to her father's pride, might be termed illegitimate ambition—was a leading, if not the principal trait in Lady Harriet's disposition. It was this, which urged her to sacrifice her youth, and even her happiness, by marrying General Wardle; so fearful was she of losing her

situation in Lord Alton's house, without some one equally brilliant insuring to her that public homage, for which alone she prized existence. To this paramount feeling she subsequently sacrificed other passions, which possibly no other motive could have mastered; and as she had learned, by the experience of the last few years, that the high station in the world of fashion, which it was the sole object of her life to maintain, depended solely on the reputation which already trembled in the balance, she determined to lose no opportunity—to hesitate at no sacrifice—or to omit no effort to secure her reinstatement, equally in her father's house, and in the estimation of society.

Fitzosborne's marriage with her cousin, seemed to be precisely the measure which, carried on as it was, publicly under her auspices, would most effectually establish these two important points; and, therefore, so long as Lionel had sufficient address to persuade Lady Harriet, that while his ambition led him to seek a union with her cousin, his heart was, as formerly,

devoted to her alone—so long did Lady Harriet zealously and sincerely promote his views, whilst no counter feeling rose in opposition to them. But Lady Harriet's penetration was not long to be so deluded; and no sooner did she perceive Fitzosborne's passion for Miss Fielding, than jealousy, hatred, and an insatiable desire of revenge, took sole possession of her bosom. To Julia she first turned all her attention; and had she perceived in her guileless heart the slightest return of love for Lionel, she mentally vowed, that not even the risk of injuring her own reputation should prevent her putting every engine into movement to break the match. But, whilst not a look or scarcely a thought of Julia's escaped her, she soon perceived, not only her attachment to Lord Calvert, but also, that fear and incipient aversion were the only sentiments with which Fitzosborne had inspired her; and, therefore, that to accelerate their marriage, was the surest method of revenge.

But when Lord Alton informed her of his

intended marriage with the woman whom, next to Julia Fielding, she most bitterly detested, all the malevolent feelings of her heart burst forth at once; and, in a paroxysm of uncontrollable rage, she fled from a scene where she considered she had been doubly duped. But in thus turning her back on the parental roof, she found not a home of domestic comfort. Her unexpected arrival at Broomhill Barracks, discovered to her a fact, which before she had only surmised—namely, that Sir Henry had consoled himself for his wife's absence, by the society of another fair one, younger, more beautiful, and scarcely to be deemed more frail.

Open and even virulent recrimination would have been easier to bear, than the systematic, hypocritical, unintermitting arrogance, with which Lady Harriet and her husband daily and hourly succeeded in torturing each other. Sir Henry was afraid openly to insult his wife, as he still, from mercenary motives, wished to remain on good terms with her father; but whilst to the world he kept up those plausible

appearances which before had imposed upon Lord Ellesmere, he endeavoured, by every covert indignity, to urge Lady Harriet to desperation, and to drive her from her home, which became gradually more and more intolerable to her; whilst, on the other hand, she, too sensitively alive both to the means and the end of his unfeeling brutality, only concealed her resentment in order more certainly to insure its gratification.

It was in this situation—a situation which brought with it pangs that even her victims might have commiserated—that she turned to Fitzosborne as a last and only refuge; and having convinced herself, that if she could persuade him to elope with her, it would be such a retaliation of her wrongs as would equally affect her father, her husband, and her rival, she wrote to him with all the eloquence of despair, and all the sophistry of practised guile.

To revive the feelings towards herself, which she yet hoped lay only dormant in Fitzosborne's

heart, she believed it was only necessary to make an avowal of her own passion for him, and to detail the wrongs her husband had inflicted on her. But to detach him from Miss Fielding, when avarice and ambition gave additional power to the spells of her beauty—this was a task indeed; but not one from which the now frenzied mind of Lady Harriet shrunk. She boldly and unequivocally told him, that Julia feared and hated him; and that all her affections were irrevocably placed on Lord Calvert, who more than returned her love. With artful ingenuity, she alluded to Fitzosborne's relations of friendship with his rival; reminded him of the early engagement that subsisted between his Lordship and Miss Fielding; dwelt on the manner in which his conduct would be reprobated by the world, when it was publicly known that he had not only betrayed his friend, but forced Julia to marry him contrary to her inclinations; and in conclusion, she again reverted to Julia's attachment to

Lord Calvert, of which she was enabled, by their previous intimacy, to give

> confirmation strong
> As proofs of holy writ——

But this confirmation was scarcely wanting to strengthen Lionel's fears, and mar his happiness. From the first moment of his acquaintance with Miss Fielding, to that in which, with a candour as admirable as it was agonizing, she had herself confessed her feelings—during the whole long period of their acquaintance, Fitzosborne had never doubted her attachment to Lord Calvert, never for an instant flattered himself that he was himself beloved. And yet, did he still wish to claim her as his wife? Yes; and if even ambition and avarice, and the elation of triumph in his rival's ruin—if even these monster-passions slept—there was towards herself a feeling almost demoniacal in his bosom, that, like the vulture of Prometheus, gnawed unseen; but

which yet murmured in his ear that often-repeated vow, that never while he had life should Julia Fielding be Lord Calvert's bride.

Writhing under the martyrdom of thought, and still grasping in his clenched hand Lady Harriet's letter, Fitzosborne slowly turned round upon his couch, as if in changing his position he could distract his thoughts: the darkness of the room had become "deeper and deeper still," and he lay with his eyes fixed on vacancy, till a faint unintelligible noise attracted his attention towards a further corner, where the gloom was still more dense. But what was the vision that floated before his fitful fancy?

A mirror, magnificent in its dimensions and stretching from the ceiling to the floor, ornamented the further end of the apartment, and across its unbroken surface a pale, flickering, unearthly light flitted, at first wavering and wan, till by degrees it settled, expanded, brightened, assumed a fearful form and colour, and at last to Fitzosborne's aching sight, Lady Harriet herself seemed to stand before him.

She appeared as she had done to him in days long since gone by, when mirth and youth and beauty strove which should deck her loveliest; a white loose robe, confined only at the waist, shaded without concealing her graceful limbs; her luxuriant hair was encircled by a chaplet of roses less blushing than her cheeks; her little foot, bound in a golden sandal, seemed to tread on flowers; and whilst one hand held a dove to her bosom, the other was raised, as if in the attitude of beckoning him towards her.

At first, Fitzosborne imagined that he had been asleep, and that the spirit of a dream had gone over his soul assuming the figure of his waking thoughts. He started, rubbed his eyes, looked again; the vision still was there. He sprung noiseless from his couch, his eye still fixed on the immoveable phantom; his arms stretched forward to grasp the incorporeal brightness, whilst every faculty was bound as by a spell. Stride after stride brought him nearer and nearer to the still stationary form. As he approached, he fancied a smile of am-

biguous import played round its mouth; another, and another step, and still the smile increased till it grew into one of scorn, and a slight contraction of the brow marked an incipient frown. He was now almost within reach. Impatience superseded awe, and he burst forward; but as he almost closed his hands to encircle it, the vision vanished, and Fitzosborne found himself leaning against the brass railing which defended the mirror—gasping, breathless, cold—yet still alas! not insensible.

Ere many minutes elapsed, he perceived a door open at the opposite end of the room; and Mr. Brinley, Lord Alton's confidential valet, enter. At all times master of his feelings, Fitzosborne advanced to meet him with an undaunted step and an unchanging countenance: yet so awfully impressed was his mind with what he had just beheld, that a cold chill, as of death, fell on his heart; and he felt as if his guardian angel whispered, that his hour was come.—And yet he shrunk not from the trial. When Brinley told him, with

an air of mystery, that Lord Alton begged to see him on particular business in his study, his voice seemed the echo of his own thoughts—it sounded as the knell of happiness; and yet Fitzosborne answered him with that bland smile, that used to play, like a sun-beam, round his beautiful mouth; and as the servant led the way, through room after room, and down the countless stairs, Fitzosborne followed him, with a determination that almost amounted to fortitude. For his was an iron mind—it might be broken, but it would never bend.

And if the firmness of his principles had but been equal to that of his mind, to what perfection of character might he not have attained! Alas! not all the miseries that now hung suspended over the head of his guilty parent—not the despair that hovered round her, who first lured him to the paths of sin—not all the retributive justice that overtook them both, even in this world, equalled the sin of losing a soul, such as Lionel's might have been!

When Fitzosborne entered Lord Alton's

study, he found him walking up and down the room, in an agitation which he felt it impossible to overcome. A silence, more impressive than words, prepared Fitzosborne for a confirmation of his forebodings; and the first word the Earl uttered being the name of Lord Tralee, at once directed his attention to the quarter from whence the expected storm was to break.

It was, however, Lionel's best policy to listen in silence—as a word—a gesture—might betray a deeper knowledge of the subject, than was compatible with perfect innocence. Thus, whilst out of delicacy to his feelings Lord Alton used every circumlocution to avoid coming too abruptly to the distressing facts of the case, Lionel's active penetration anticipated the result; and employed his thoughts, during Lord Alton's recital, in methodizing and arranging his future plans.

The Earl's silence at last convinced him, that he had nothing more to learn; but his own still continued, till the subject uppermost in his mind burst in an unpremeditated excla-

mation—"And Julia!—must I lose *her* too?"

As he uttered this, an expression of agony marked his manly countenance, that none could have beheld unmoved. But it was not the weak, wailing sorrow, that would condescend to pity; it was a grief chiseled in every lineament by despair—sublime in its intensity—dignified by its calmness. Lord Alton hastily replied, rather to his thoughts than words.—Disclaiming equally for himself and for his niece any vacillation, which merely a change in pecuniary circumstances could effect, he assured him, that it rested only with himself to confirm or annul their existing engagements; and as the Earl handed to him Miss Fielding's note, he felt more commiseration for his trials, and more respect for the fortitude with which he sustained them, than a few minutes previous he could have supposed possible.

And now, as Fitzosborne's destiny trembled in the balance, where was his guardian angel hovering?—Did he, in the flutterings of his

heart, whisper, that prudence—honour—love itself, forbade his claiming Julia's unwilling vows?—or did he, even in the form of pity, light on the quivering scale, and give the preponderance to virtue and to happiness? For a moment, Fitzosborne paused. He remembered Julia's tears—her sighs; and as he thought of them in silence, he put her note into his bosom; but ere it reached his heart, the scroll of Lady Harriet rustled to his touch. Love—honour—prudence, fled with his guardian spirit from the Circean talisman; and all the infuriate passions burst in upon his soul in fearful mastery.

Again the vampyre's brightness glowed in his eyes, and played in insidious smiles—as again, withdrawing Julia's note from his bosom, he raised it to his lips, and affected to attribute his momentary distraction to being overcome by this unlooked-for evidence of her regard. "Forgive me, my Lord, but I am now myself again. This dear Julia—*my* Julia, tells me, that her sentiments towards me are in no de-

gree altered. With her, a much less fortune than even that which I must eventually inherit, would give me happiness beyond the common lot of man; and how can I regret—except from motives of filial duty—circumstances which have occasioned so strong a proof of Julia's attachment?"

As Lionel said this, his dazzling eyes almost glared on Lord Alton's face, as if he wished to trace in its expression how far Julia had communicated to him the real state of her feelings, which Fitzosborne himself knew but too well; but Lord Alton betrayed no consciousness indicative of the confidence that had been placed in him, and, dextrously turning the conversation to pecuniary arrangements, he informed Fitzosborne of the generous manner in which Lord Calvert had provided for his friend, by resigning the official situation which had been at his option, solely on an understanding that it should be given to Fitzosborne; and without farther comment the Earl handed to him the minister's acquiescence in this arrangement.

A pang, as if of death's last struggle, shot through Fitzosborne's heart as he heard this proof of generosity in the man he had betrayed. His eyes swam, and for a moment he leaned his head on his hand in total abstraction. There was another moment of redemption! Alas! the furies that seemed to lash him onwards, whispered that this was but a bribe to induce him to forego a far superior prize. For an instant, his closely compressed lips seemed to move rather in execration than in thankfulness—and in the next, he expressed his grateful acceptance of the office, as eloquently, and at the same time as calmly, as if it was merely a just tribute to his own undoubted excellence.

From that moment all effervescence of feeling was at an end, as well on his side as on that of Lord Alton—the mere dry detail of pecuniary arrangement being all that remained to be discussed between them; and Lionel had the address to persuade Lord Alton, that it was more than ever advisable that the marriage should take place without delay; for in cha-

racter of Julia's husband, he could better interfere in the payment of his father's debt to the crown, without leaving her fortune too much exposed to Lord Tralee's demands upon it. It was therefore finally determined that Fitzosborne should return at twelve the following day, for the purpose of executing the settlements, preparatory to the marriage being solemnized the day after; and, as under all the circumstances it would be particularly disagreeable to all parties that Lord Tralee and Lord Alton should meet, Lionel offered to proceed immediately to his father's, to acquaint him with all that had occurred, and to make preparations for his signature being taken at his own house.

It was past twelve at night, when Fitzosborne reached Portman Square. The unfortunate nobleman had just retired to his study, as was his nightly practice; but, on this occasion, he had not done so for the purpose (although on the excuse) of transacting business; he had merely entered it to enjoy the happiness of reflecting

on the pinnacle of grandeur to which he had attained; for that day was the meridian of all his glory; and never had the sun of his greatness shone brighter than the hour before it was eclipsed for ever.

Lord Tralee had that day attended the levee, and received even the compliments of Majesty itself, on the increasing honour of his family, in the approaching union between his son and Miss Fielding. The proud and gratified nobleman fluttered in all the exultation of satisfied ambition, unconscious of the abyss already opened at his feet. He received the congratulations of his partisans. He triumphed in the scarce suppressed mortifications of his enemies, and was elated by the very notoriety, which to him was in itself a happiness. He returned home to enjoy the gratifications of vanity even to satiety; for he had that day engaged a party to dinner of the class of dependants, which being nominally in that of gentlemen, are always the favourite satellites of upstart grandeur. To them, with unpitying exactitude, Lord Tralee

detailed, even to the minutest compliment, the manner of reception at court, as he presided with lordly pomp at the splendid banquet which was spread, not for hospitality but ostentation. It is true, many, whose feelings he mercilessly irritated, gratified their spleen even in his presence, by treacherous interrogatory, or hyperbole of praise. But their day of retribution was not yet come; and when Lionel's rap sounded in his Lordship's ear, it roused him from a delicious reverie, in which his soul was revelling in dreams of added grandeur.

What language can depict the scene that then ensued? Fitzosborne's fevered blood boiled with the frenzy of tossing passions, which, pent for hours in his bosom, at last burst forth with ungovernable rage. Instead of commiserating the misery his intelligence could not fail to inflict upon his wretched parent, it seemed as if Heaven aggravated its punishment by sending it through him. Without restraint, and almost without delicacy, he unfolded the tale of total, hopeless ruin; and,

not satisfied with exaggerating the obloquy which had fallen upon Lord Tralee, he even embittered its effects by attributing them solely to his own misconduct.

"If you even," said he, "had had the talent to carry your fraudulent designs effectively into execution, by destroying the evidences of your guilt, you might have gloried where now you only tremble; or—"

"Spare me! spare me, my son!" exclaimed the agitated old man, whilst tears coursed each other down his cheeks. "The world may have forsaken me, but you will not desert me too?"

"Desert you? Why, you cannot expect, that when the highest pinnacle of ambition seems within my reach, that I will voluntarily forego the prize, and grovel on the ground with you? *I* am not answerable for your errors. You never even followed my advice in regard to that scoundrel Simmons."

"What, Lionel! would you have had me answer for the horrors of another death-bed?"

Fitzosborne laughed a savage laugh of mock-

ery, and then added, in a tone of bitter raillery, "No doubt your Lordship is prepared for all the consequences of this discovery, since you thought it so little worth your while to avert them."

"I have *not* the money, Lionel; you know I have not. The last bill I paid of yours, with the money I advanced for the preparations of your marriage, took every sixpence I had in the world: and you know I have already given my bond to my brother for seven thousand pounds. Tell me; advise me. What would you do, if you were me?"

"Hang myself, perhaps; and so settle at once with my accusers and my creditors." Lord Tralee shuddered, as he gazed wildly on his son; who the next moment proceeded, with assumed indifference, "This is only what I should do myself; I do not presume to dictate to one whose judgment and whose courage are alike superior to my own." The bow which accompanied this irony, affected not to hide the smile of contumely which curled his lip.

"But is then the impeachment inevitable? will no bribes, no promises avail?"

"Your Lordship's promises are already understood; and as to bribes, you say you have no money. However, I trust the impeachment is not inevitable; for if it were, and that your dear-bought title was to depend on the proofs of your innocence, I should be much inclined, in my own person, to anticipate the conclusion of the tragedy. No—no; the title must be saved at any price."

"Ah! dear Lionel! I knew you were only trifling with me—I knew you would never abandon your poor old father, whose only hope is in you; and now, tell me, how are we to manage this?"

"By a great sacrifice on both sides. I will purchase from you, with my wife's fortune, *all* your property here, and in Ireland; and I will even lend you as much more as will be necessary to make up the stipulated sum—"

"And how—where am I to live?" eagerly inquired the almost stupified Lord Tralee.

"Any where *abroad* you please, for a year or two: I will allow you a competence—much it cannot be; but then, I will only do this on one condition—

"And what is that?" breathlessly inquired his agitated parent—

"That in a given period—say two years at furthest—you resign to me the title which I thus buy—"

"Resign to you my title!—that is impossible, whilst I have life!"

"And does your Lordship's experience suggest to you no plan, such as a change of name and residence, by which the world may be taught to suppose you dead, even whilst you are in the actual enjoyment of an *honourable* old age?" And now the superior talent and unshaken firmness which Lionel possessed, gave him such an unquestioned superiority over his nearly heart-broken parent, that all his dictates became as irreversible as laws. At first, the old man, surprised—bewildered—mortified, tried to rouse the dormant feelings of affection,

which once he had flattered himself had existed in his son. With tremulous eagerness, he described the helpless situation of Fitzosborne's mother, and of his sisters, with an abjectness that only roused Lionel's contempt: he urged—he implored that he might be placed in any situation, however mean; as agent to his own estates; or as the humblest clerk in any public office, so that he might be allowed to drag out the miserable remainder of his days any where, rather than in the land of the stranger, to whom even his wants would be unintelligible. But Lionel was inflexible. The name of his father would, thenceforward, be a disgrace—and his presence injury. This he pointed out to him with the cool, merciless precision of an unfeeling executioner; and at last he succeeded in perfectly convincing him of his own determination, and in some degree also of the inevitable necessity of Lord Tralee acceding to his plans—a necessity on which Fitzosborne represented that the very means of his Lordship's exoneration from impeachment was, by

his marriage with Miss Fielding, in fact contingent.

Thus, feeling himself entirely in the power of his unrelenting son, the unfortunate nobleman found further remonstrance or resistance unavailing; and at four o'clock in the morning, Fitzosborne left his father's house, in the proud conviction that he had once more triumphed over destiny; and that fortune, love, and power, were but as his attendant spirits, obedient to the supremacy of his master mind.

CHAPTER XV.

A CATASTROPHE.

The wretch concentred all in self
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And doubly dying shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung
Unwept—unhonoured—and unsung.

SCOTT.

AT four o'clock in the morning, Fitzosborne parted from his father: at twelve, he entered Lord Alton's vestibule. His step was quick; but it was not that gay, elastic bound, that indicates a bridegroom's joy: his dark eyes gleamed with concentrated fire; but the light

that played in them so fearfully, was not the pure lambent flame of love. Yet, still his air was resolute; his countenance impenetrable; and none but the recording angel that viewed him out of heaven could deem what storms were raging in his bosom.

On entering the drawing-room, he found Lord Alton and Mr. Fielding waiting to receive him: the latter, with his usual overflowing kindness, greeted him with a cordiality that was even enhanced by the casual recollection of the misfortune that had so lately befallen his family. Lord Alton, with more guarded urbanity, by making no alteration whatever in his manner towards Fitzosborne, better succeeded in appearing to have no recollection of what had occurred; and as, a few minutes afterwards, the lawyers entered with their ponderous deeds and settlements, no pause was left even for condolences. The revision of these papers was a mere matter of form, as they had already been carefully perused by each of the three gentlemen; and therefore without further delay

Mr. Fielding left the room, in search of the bride.

Breathless with an anxiety that partook less of pleasure than of an undefined dread, Fitzosborne fixed his eyes immoveably on the door through which Mr. Fielding had retired, and which gave entrance to a room that had formerly been Lady Harriet's boudoir, but which latterly had been appropriated to Julia. After the lapse of a few seconds, which to Lionel appeared an age, the door again slowly opened, and for one single instant Lionel imagined that he again beheld the vision of the night before. But the deception lasted but an instant; for Julia herself appeared at the door leaning on her father's arm. Her eyes were bent on the ground; and a paleness, as if of death, overspread her features; but her pencilled brow was calm and unbent; her dark eye-lashes, as they lay on her cheek of snow, betrayed no trace of tears; and though her step was slow and noiseless, it yet was firm.

A dead silence prevailed as she approached

the table. Fitzosborne involuntarily stepped a few paces forward, as if to meet her. But he suddenly recollected that he had not seen her since Lord Alton gave him her note the night before; and a feeling compounded of respect and doubt, riveted him to the spot on which he stood. Meanwhile, the lawyers, by whom all this was unperceived, or at least unintelligible, busied themselves in the technicalities of the business on which they were summoned; and thus broke in some degree the silence which would otherwise have been embarrassing.

"And now, Ma'am, it is your turn to sign," exclaimed the officiating clerk. Julia mechanically took the pen in her hand; "Here, Ma'am, in this space—and again, on these other parchments—one deed more, Ma'am, and then——"

"Then you are mine for ever, Julia," whispered Fitzosborne, in a deep, hollow, almost sepulchral tone. Julia started; and as she finished writing, the pen dropped from her hand. For the first time, she raised her eyes to his; a faint and forced smile lightened her coun-

tenance for a moment; but the effort was too much for her strength. She hastily closed her eyes again—staggered—and, holding out both hands towards her father, "Save me!" she exclaimed, and sunk senseless on the floor.

In the first confusion, nothing was thought of but the common restoratives, all of which proved ineffectual; till Lord Alton, to whom perhaps more than any other person the real cause of Julia's suffering was known, fearing that possibly on the moment of her recovery some unguarded exclamation might escape from her, proposed that she should be carried into the adjoining room, and left to the attendance of her maid; then lifting her, with the assistance of Fitzosborne (for Mr. Fielding's agitation rendered him useless), they together carried her into the boudoir, and laid her inanimate form upon the couch; "And now, Mr. Fitzosborne," whispered the Earl, "let me propose that you should accompany those gentlemen to your father's, to have the deeds completed; and

before you return, I trust this dear girl will be perfectly recovered."

Fitzosborne prepared to obey these injunctions in silence; for, bewildered by contending emotions, he almost wished for an opportunity of escaping from so afflicting a scene: yet, ere he quitted the apartment, he turned to take a last look of his still lifeless bride. But what vision again pursued him? Her corpse-like figure lay stretched on the couch, as if in the stillness of death; whilst above her gleamed the semblance of Lady Harriet Moreton, as it had appeared to him the night before. Her head was still bound with flowers; but the smile of scorn was increased, as she looked down in triumph on her, whose spirit seemed already passed beyond this troubled sphere. His glazed eye scarcely imbibed the consciousness that this was indeed only a portrait; still less could his confused and wandering thoughts collect the fact, that transverse reflections of this very portrait, on opposite mirrors, had, when the door was opened, produced that optical delusion,

which twice before had so fearfully bewildered his imagination. The idea did not occur to him; and, scarcely stopping to arrange his thoughts, he hurried into the adjoining room, almost superstitiously impressed with a belief that the unearthly figure of his earliest love trod on his footsteps, and smiled that hateful smile of scorn, to foretell a triumph in his misery.

His carriage was still in waiting; and, accompanied by the lawyers and their papers, he proceeded directly to Portman Square. "It is possible my father may not, at this moment, be able to receive you, gentlemen," said he to them on entering. "If you will allow me, I will prepare him for your entrance." So saying, Fitzosborne ushered them into the dining-room, and hurried towards his father's study.

"My Lord has been very, very impatient for your arrival, sir: there is a gentleman with him."

"Who?—who is it?" peremptorily demanded

Fitzosborne, as he interrupted the mysterious whisper of his father's confidential valet, who had been purposely stationed there by Lord Tralee, to intercept his son.

"I don't know the gentleman's name, sir; but I believe he is one of the head magistrates of Bow Street:—but here is a note, sir."

Fitzosborne again interrupted him—snatched the paper from his hand—he crumpled it together unread; and striding onwards towards his father's door, burst into the room, as if in defiance of his fate.

A gentleman of middle age, and composed but prepossessing appearance, rose from his seat on Lionel's entrance, and received him with a silent salutation. His father started, but seemed unable to rise.—"Thank God you are come!" exclaimed Lord Tralee at last; and adding, "Sir, here's my son," he sunk back in his chair, apparently overpowered by emotion. Fitzosborne looked inquiringly from him to the stranger, whose features he tried in vain to recognise; till, having slightly motioned to

him to be seated, he slowly drew his own chair opposite to his, and in a tone between anger and disdain, inquired of his father "what was the subject of their conference?"

"I am come," rejoined the stranger, with composure, yet somewhat of hesitation, "on a most unpleasant business; and yet allow me to assure you, Mr. Fitzosborne, that no person can be more averse than I am to interfering in the private concerns of any gentleman."

Fitzosborne bowed coldly: he construed this preamble as alluding to Lord Tralee exclusively, and cast on his father a look of fearful import. The stranger continued:—

"I repeat to you, Mr. Fitzosborne, that nothing but a hope of extricating a family so respectable as yours, from difficulty at least, if not from danger, could have induced me to act as I am now doing."

"I have no doubt, sir," replied Fitzosborne, haughtily, "that my father will properly appreciate your services, whatever they may be." A transient cloud passed over the stranger's counte-

nance: he soon, however, resumed, though with somewhat more dignity of manner:—

"Perhaps, sir, you are not aware that I am come here in my official capacity, as well as in the character of a well-wisher at least, though not an acquaintance of Lord Tralee?"

The thought instantly glanced across Fitzosborne's mind that his father was to be immediately arrested; but the proximity of danger only served to rouse every energy of Fitzosborne's mind. With equal promptitude and dignity he replied; "I understood, sir, that the arrangements entered into between Lord Alton and myself were to have superseded all official interference."

"Excuse me, sir," rejoined the stranger authoritatively, "but I can never believe that Lord Alton is a party to the transaction to which I allude. There must be some misunderstanding between us. To come to the point at once, I beg to ask you, do you know a person who styles himself Barney M'Clane?"

Quick as the lightning's flash did horror and

conviction thrill through every nerve as this hated name vibrated on Fitzosborne's ear; but a faint sound, as of a stifled groan, was all that indicated his mental agitation. His polished brow remained unmoved; and even a smile—such as in days of old had stolen many a suffrage—even such a smile played round his mouth as, the next moment, he turned to his interlocutor, and with incomparable composure, inquired whether the gentleman's business referred to Lord Tralee, or to himself, as, if to himself, he was willing to attend him at any place, or at any time, except the present moment, when business of the utmost importance claimed his immediate attention.

"Sir, nothing can be so important, so imperative as the business *I* am now upon. Your father is already in some degree acquainted with the purport of my visit;" and the stranger again looked towards Lord Tralee.

"Go on, go on," exclaimed the agitated old man; his head still leaning on the back of the chair in which he sat; his two elbows resting

on its arms; his hands clasped, nay, clenched together, and the perspiration bursting from his forehead.

"Again, let me ask you, Mr. Fitzosborne, do you know a man called Barney M'Clane?

"I do," calmly replied Fitzosborne; "and allow *me* to ask, sir, why you have repeated this interrogatory?"

"My motives will be easily explained, when I tell you that this man, accompanied by his wife and a fine boy about three years old, have been before me at Bow Street."

"He has not!—he dare not!" vehemently exclaimed Fitzosborne, as he started on his feet. It was the first and the last time that his agitation mastered his discretion. The moment after the interruption was given, he resumed his seat, and thenceforward listened in mute attention. Meantime Lord Tralee, startled by Lionel's asseveration, eagerly turned his waning eyes upon his son. One look sufficed. The old man again leaned back; but now, as if to conceal his emotion, he hid his face with one

hand, whilst the other hung cold and listless from the arm of his chair. The stranger, after a short pause, proceeded—

"These persons came a few days ago to Bow Street, and desired to be heard in private by one of the Magistrates; they were also accompanied by a man, who subsequently signed his name Simmons; whether their attorney or not, I do not know; but he seemed to direct all their proceedings."

A slight gesture, as of impatience, escaped from Lord Tralee; but Lionel's fortitude was imperturbable. The gentleman continued:—"It fell to my lot to hear what these people had to say; and the man, Barney M'Clane, proceeded to state, in strange Irish terms, that he had a weight on his conscience, of which he wished to disburthen himself; said something not very intelligible about having promised to take an oath to conceal a circumstance of great importance. Indeed here Mr. Simmons interfered so much in M'Clane's narration, that I could not exactly understand either what were

his future intentions, or what was his motive for coming to me. However, he desired to make a deposition before me, on oath, as he said, to relieve his conscience——"

"Does that deposition concern me?" asked Lionel, somewhat impatiently, but yet with the courage of one coolly determined to brave the extremity of danger.

"It does, indeed, affect you most materially," rejoined the gentleman, who, taking from his pocket a paper, proceeded to read it aloud. It stated, in set terms, that Lionel Fitzosborne had, on a specified day, come to a house then inhabited by M'Clane and his wife, for the purpose of contracting a supposititious marriage with a young girl of the name of Nancy Jones, niece to M'Clane, and then residing with him and his wife; that by bribes, and threats, and promises, Barney had at first consented to aid in the plot of deceiving this young girl, by imposing on her a fictitious instead of a real marriage; and that it was accordingly arranged between him and Fitzosborne, that the ceremony

should be performed by the parish priest, known by the name of Father Murphy; because, as both Fitzosborne and Nancy were Protestants, a marriage celebrated by a Catholic clergyman would, from its illegality, be null and void; that under the pretence of bribing Father Murphy, M'Clane had further extorted a large sum of money from Fitzosborne; but that, partly affected by remorse, and partly by the remonstrances of his wife, Barney applied this money in procuring a regular license for the marriage of Nancy Jones and Lionel Fitzosborne, as also in paying other legal expenses; and that, instead of bringing the Catholic priest to perform the ceremony, he had, under false pretences, induced the Protestant clergyman of the adjoining parish (who was equally unknown to Fitzosborne) to officiate; and, consequently, that his marriage with Nancy Jones was, in every respect, legally solemnised and duly attested.

The paper further went on to state, that the boy who then accompanied them, and who was

commonly known by the name of Charles Jones, was the child of this marriage, and, consequently, the legitimate son of Lionel Fitzosborne; and lastly, that the only reason why Barney M'Clane had so long allowed these circumstances to remain secret, was the fact, that Mr. Fitzosborne had taken his wife away with him, and from that day Barney M'Clane had never been able to ascertain what had become of her; nor did he now know to a certainty, whether she was dead or alive, although Mr. Fitzosborne had frequently assured him that she was alive, and in good health, and resident somewhere in England.

The gentleman was permitted, both by father and son, to finish the perusal of this paper uninterruptedly; suppressed groans from Lord Tralee being their only response. When he had finished, a dead silence ensued. Lionel's eyes were fixed on the ground, and no motion, not even a change of colour, gave indication of his feelings. At length he slowly rose, and approaching the stranger, asked, in his usual

insinuating voice, if he might be permitted to read the paper? It was of course handed to him; and he turned towards the fire-place, as if to hide his emotions; but the experienced magistrate closely watched his every movement. "That is merely a copy," observed he, with apparent indifference; "the original, with the clergyman's certificate, is duly attested elsewhere." Whether this observation made any alteration in Fitzosborne's purpose is uncertain; but, deliberately concluding the perusal of the paper, he returned it to the magistrate, and then calmly addressed Lord Tralee—

"I am sorry, father, that this unpleasant, I should say foolish, business, has come to your ears, without preparation or explanation. M'Clane is a rascal; and I flatter myself," continued he, turning to the stranger, "I shall have no difficulty in proving my assertion."

"Then you deny his statement? Thank God! Thank God!" and Lord Tralee almost started on his feet.

"Not entirely," replied the undisturbed

Fitzosborne; I certainly do not, cannot deny my marriage. For it, and for the secrecy with which it was conducted, I have, father, to ask your forgiveness. But," added he, again turning to the other gentleman, "I deny that it was ever my intention to solemnise a fictitious marriage. It was only my wish to keep it secret for a short time, till my family could be reconciled to it; and had she lived—"

"Then, sir," inquired the magistrate, "am I to understand that this Nancy Jones is no more?"

"She died, sir;"—and here Fitzosborne seemed to sigh;—"she died before our child was born; and the boy whom this M'Clane so infamously—"

At this moment, Fitzosborne was interrupted by a gradually increasing noise in the adjacent hall; and the next, the door opened, and Mrs. Smith staggered into the room. She had just risen, pale and emaciated, from a bed of sickness, and now appeared before them almost as the ghost of her own departed beauty; and

yet her dark eye still shone with a fading ray of loveliness as it rested on Fitzosborne. She stood for a moment silent, whilst horror and surprise seemed to have congealed every faculty in the minds of those to whom her presence was so unexpected. At last, slowly raising one hand to her forehead, she extended the other towards Fitzosborne. Her countenance assumed a look of wildness, and she muttered, in a low voice, some unintelligible words, which gradually became louder and more coherent.

"Home! where is my home?—my child? That's his father; ay, there he stands. Speak, Lionel—husband!—tell me where is my boy? I say, Fitzosborne;"—and here she approached close to him;—"I, your wedded wife—I charge you by your hopes of heaven to give me back my boy! I'll join no longer in this secrecy. Give me back my child, I say, and own me as your wife."

"The woman's mad!" faintly articulated Fitzosborne, as he turned away from her, his arms crossed on his bosom.

"I am not mad, Fitzosborne—I am not mad—I am your wife. I heard you intended to disown me for ever, and to marry another woman; but this I never, never will believe. Give me my boy—." Tears almost choked her utterance, as she sunk on her knees before Fitzosborne, and clasped her hands together in the agony of despair:—"Give me my child! I ask no more.—I'll leave you, Fitzosborne, for you have ceased to love me. But, in the name of that God who sees us both, give me back my boy—my darling, cherub boy!"

The door had cautiously been opened behind her, of which she was still unconscious, although the stranger was aware of the circumstance. Mr. Simmons put his head quickly into the room, as if to ascertain who was there; and then, turning his back to those already in the apartment, he seemed to beckon to some persons outside, as he spoke in a somewhat sneering tone—"If you have told truth, you can, I suppose, at once identify her."

Barney and Judy, leading the child, rushed

together into the room. Mrs. Smith was still on her knees at Fitzosborne's feet; but she turned her head round at the scream with which they both together recognised her; whilst, at the same instant, the frightened boy hid his face in Judy's apron, as she hung upon his mother's neck.

All this was momentary—so was the action of Fitzosborne. He sprung forwards, and with one bound stood at Simmons's ear—"Scoundrel!" was all he uttered: the wretch, impotent from fear, fell prostrate on the floor; and in doing so his life was saved; for Lionel had drawn a loaded pistol from his bosom. The ball missed its aim, and struck against the opposite wall. The room was instantly filled with smoke; and ere it cleared away, Mrs. Smith, or rather Mrs. Fitzosborne, was on her feet:—she missed her husband. The door was open, and she rushed onwards. For one single instant, all was still: the next, the report of a pistol again was heard, followed by a maniac shriek. The noise attracted every one

to the spot from whence it issued; and there, stretched senseless on the ground, they beheld her, lying with her arms clasped round the corpse of her self-immolated husband.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Song, beauty, youth, love, virtue, joy—this group
Of bright ideas, flowers of Paradise
As yet unforfeit! in one blaze we bind,
Kneel and present it to the skies, as all
We guess of heav'n.

YOUNG.

THE horrid tidings of Fitzosborne's fate reached not the ear of Julia Fielding; for that ear had lost its consciousness; and the heart which once beat responsive to all others' woe, now fluttered on the confines of that better world, where hope itself is known no more.

Her fainting fit continued so long, that Lord

Alton, even more alarmed than Mr. Fielding, sent privately for a physician ; whilst her father, seeking relief from agony in mere bodily exertion, ran himself for Lady Ellesmere, scarcely conscious what he sought, and almost incapable of explaining his yet unfathomed misery. But his broken words—his haggard countenance—his tottering limbs, which scarcely could support him as he stood,——all told his fears more forcibly than words could have uttered them; and before Lady Ellesmere knew what to dread, she and Lady Matilda found themselves with Mr. Fielding, at Lord Alton's door, having merely left a verbal message to explain their absence to Lord Ellesmere and Lady Louisa, who were then riding in the Park with Mr. Russel.

Lord Alton met them in the hall: a few words sufficed to inform them that the physician had at last succeeded in rousing Julia from that fearful trance; but that she had woke delirious. She was then in bed, and the doctor was anxiously awaiting the effect of an opiate draught he had administered, which had been so far

beneficial, as to have caused her to fall into a slumber, from which it was of the utmost consequence that she should not be disturbed.

Mr. Fielding, totally unmanned by the suddenness of his affliction, consented to accompany Lord Alton to his study, there to remain till the physician sent for him; whilst Lady Ellesmere and her daughter, scarcely less unhappy, though infinitely more composed, stole softly into Julia's room, to take their station at the bedside of the sufferer.

The window-shutters were all closed, except one at the farthest end of the room, which was left partially open. The single ray of light which this aperture admitted, fell on the bridal dress which Julia was to have worn on the morrow. The jewels which Fitzosborne had presented to her, still sparkled in the sun-beam, and the flowers, intended for her hair, glowed freshly in the brightness. In the farthest and darkest corner, lay Julia, still asleep; beside her, sat the doctor, silently feeling her bounding pulse; whilst her maid, pale with grief and con-

sternation, looked breathlessly in his countenance.

On seeing Lady Ellesmere, Doctor Stanley rose, and pointing to the dressing-room door, which stood open, followed them thither with cautious and unheard tread.

"What is your opinion of her?" was the half-uttered query.

"She is in a high fever at present; her pulse is a hundred and twenty, and I think increasing."

"Is she in danger?" "Is there immediate cause for alarm?" and both the ladies spoke at once, though in the faintest whispers. The doctor only shook his head; for an unintelligible noise recalled him instantaneously to Julia's side. She had awakened, and was sitting upright in her bed. Her cap had fallen off; and her long and glossy hair fell unconstrained on her shoulders: one ringlet she had selected from the rest, and with evident unconsciousness was twining it round her smooth and polished arm, whilst the sun-beam, which the diamonds

reflected, gave a strange wild beauty to her eyes and cheek, as it fitfully played across her fevered countenance. But this calm was momentary. Mistaking the physician for Fitzosborne, she attempted to escape from him; and as he withheld her from doing so, she uttered the most phrenzied ravings, till, worn out by her sufferings, she again sunk into torpor from the mere incapacity of tired nature.

"This cannot last long," whispered Doctor Stanley. "I should like to have other advice." Additional physicians were therefore sent for, and all the aids that London could procure were sought in vain; for the fever continued daily to increase, and the only alternation perceptible, was from the wildness of delirium to the languor of exhaustion: but whenever she did speak, it was to betray all the long-treasured secrets of her innocent heart. And Lord Calvert, who had returned to London on the news of Fitzosborne's death, spent days and nights at the threshold of her door, listening to the wild tones in which sometimes she called on

him to come and rescue her from Lionel; and sometimes to the unnatural sweetness with which she warbled his favourite airs, as she fancied herself walking with him in the woods of Ellesmere, or gathering flowers in the garden at the rectory.

At last, the ninth day approached. Mr. Fielding, in whom habitual piety supplied the place of fortitude, had so far mastered his feelings as to bear his affliction at least without a murmur, though none could mark the daily alteration in his looks without calculating the intensity of his suffering. He felt, however, that he had yet other duties to perform, and he therefore minutely interrogated the physicians as to their opinion of Julia's immediate danger.

"You are aware," said Doctor Stanley, "that the ninth day is a fearful crisis, and *that*, if I mistake not, is to-morrow."

"And have you no hopes?"

"I will not deceive you, Mr. Fielding—I have none."

"Then, my poor Julia!—to-morrow night I

may be childless." He laid his face on his hands, which were crossed on the table, and the tears were seen trickling between his withered fingers; but in a moment or two he faintly added, "God's will be done!"

"It is possible," continued Doctor Stanley, after a short pause, "that the termination of Miss Fielding's disorder may not be so immediate. If our efforts succeed at all, she may to-morrow so far recover as to be no longer liable to a return of delirium; but I own to you our opinion is, that even if this occurs, her strength is already so much exhausted, that her ultimate recovery is scarcely, if at all, to be looked for."

"Doctor," replied Mr. Fielding, looking up, but unconscious that the tears still lay on his furrowed cheeks, "let me ask you, as a father, and as a clergyman, do you think that my child will be able to take the sacrament before—before she dies?"

"As to that, Mr. Fielding, you are the best judge, from your previous knowledge of Miss Fielding's character, what effect the intro-

duction of such a subject may have upon her mind: all I can say is, that if she is to take it, I strongly recommend that it should be to-morrow; after that, I fear it may be too late." Here Doctor Stanley's voice faltered, and, unwilling to betray his emotion, he arose, and a silent pressure of the hand was all that passed farther between the two gentlemen, as they parted for the night.

The next morning, Mr. Fielding was unconscious of the lapse of hours, when he was roused from his prayers by a reiterated though gentle tap at his door; and on opening it, he beheld Lady Louisa. Her quick breathing, and her burning cheek, betrayed her agitation; but whilst her eyes swam in tears, her mouth was clad in smiles; and yet she spoke in a whisper, as if still in Julia's room. "She is awake, and quite—quite herself; she has asked twice for you; and the doctors have sent me for you: quick, quick, don't lose a moment;" and she took Mr. Fielding's hand, as he almost staggered backwards.

Hope for an instant played round his heart; but it was only for an instant. He looked up, and beheld Lady Matilda calm as a statue—but as pallid too. "I have brought you this cup of coffee," said she, with a melancholy smile; "and Doctor Stanley's compliments, with a request that you will make haste." Mr. Fielding understood the message. He took the cup in silence, turned aside for a moment to recover himself, and then composedly led the way to Julia's room.

She was raised in her bed, and supported by pillows, to relieve him. Too weak to make any efforts to move, she merely turned her eyes towards the door, where she expected him to enter. When she beheld him, a smile, or rather a beam of joy, irradiated her whole countenance; and the next moment, her eyes were raised to heaven, as if in thankfulness; but they closed again, and a few tears escaped from beneath her long, silken eye-lashes, as the old man, tottering with age and woe, fell on his knees at her bedside; and stretching up his arms to their utmost

length, murmured a blessing on his child, and then concealed his face in the foldings of the counterpane.

A silence, as of death, ensued. Julia was the first to speak. "Father, dear—dear father," said she, in a faint and hollow voice, as she stretched out her burning hand towards him; he seized it between both of his, and looked wistfully in her face, but yet he could not speak.

"Do not grieve thus, my father," resumed she, yet articulating with difficulty. "A few short years will soon be over, and we shall, I trust, be both with my poor mother in heaven."

"Alas! my child," whispered the almost broken-hearted old man, "that it should have pleased God to take thee first! my child! my only child!" The accents died on his lips; but his countenance showed that they were lost in prayer.

"And thou, Julia," he resumed, "thou who at this moment canst comfort thy bereaved parent; art thou, love, thyself prepared to die?"

And now, no longer the weak parent, and heir of mortal agony, the minister of God, ennobled by his office, and purified in grief, could speak of heavenly bliss when all that earth could offer was fading to his view. With all the humility of the Christian's faith, did Julia pour into her father's ear the little tale of doubts and sorrows. But the energy of nature was fading fast away; and as her voice sunk, and her breath grew shorter, she motioned to him her wish that the last ceremony of the sacrament should no longer be delayed

Every thing was prepared; and although Julia was not aware that any person but her father was in the room, many was the afflicted heart that poured forth its orison to Heaven in unison with hers. Even outside the farther door, some of the old family domestics knelt on the stairs, and prayed that she might be spared to them; whilst at the foot of her bed, though concealed by its curtains, Lady Ellesmere and her daughters scarcely suppressed their sobs, as they whispered their "Amen."

Ere the ceremony was concluded, the sufferer, overcome by pain and fatigue, closed her eyes, and seemed gradually to sink into repose. "You must leave us now, my good sir," observed Doctor Stanley to Mr. Fielding, gently drawing him from the bed, where he hung in agony over his child; "her pulse is very, very low, and any sudden emotion would be fatal." Mr. Fielding's gesture indicated remonstrance, but both Lord Alton and Lady Ellesmere stepping forward at the same time, passed each an arm through his, and with friendly violence led him from the apartment.

Lady Matilda alone was permitted by the physicians to remain. Her sister, to whom inaction was most insupportable, sometimes sat on the stairs, listening to every stir in Julia's room, and still oftener voluntarily undertook the execution of every commission that was given by the physicians for Julia's temporary relief.

By degrees, the shades of evening gave way to night, and the stillness of the house seemed to become more and more mournful, as dark-

ness approached. The only note that was taken of the hours, was the often-repeated watchman's cry, which became more audible as the noise of distant carriages gradually subsided: and yet, though the hours thus rolled on, time itself seemed annihilated to those whose only thoughts were fixed on one sad overpowering subject. Most of the family were assembled in the library: Mr. Fielding, in a lethargy of grief, sat in his arm-chair; his hands clenched, and his eyes fixed in vacancy. Lord Ellesmere, to whom Julia was as a daughter, sobbed aloud; whilst his Countess read, though in a tremulous voice, one of Blair's most eloquent and consoling sermons. Lord Alton meanwhile sat in the shade, absorbed in his own melancholy meditations. And where was Lord Calvert? His feelings were too acute for even the consolation of companionship in sorrow. He had stationed himself unseen, and in the dark, in the room adjoining Julia's dressing-room, listening breathless to every sound, and only retaining the consciousness of despair.

A slight movement was distinguishable in Julia's room. He listened still more eagerly; and heard, or fancied he heard, a message given to Lady Louisa, whose light footsteps he recognised rapidly descending the stairs. She returned as quickly in a few seconds. He then distinctly heard the room-door open, and again all was still.

In about ten minutes, a light was seen in the adjoining dressing-room; and Doctor Stanley himself approached the spot where Lord Calvert stood motionless, leaning for support against the wall which separated him from Julia. As Doctor Stanley advanced, he held the taper up to shed its light upon Lord Calvert's countenance. Its expression could not be mistaken; and, shaking his head emphatically, as he deposited the candlestick on the table, "I am afraid," said he, "my dear Lord, you have not the fortitude I gave you credit for. I am come to confide a circumstance to you, that I do not mean to mention down stairs. Come, rouse yourself, Lord Calvert, or I shall leave you.

Within this half hour, a decided change has taken place in Miss Fielding."

"For the better? or the worse?" gasped out Lord Calvert.

"Apparently for the better: she woke collected, and asked for a crust of bread. You see, my dear young friend, I keep my promise, of giving you timely notice of every circumstance. Such changes as the present are often lightenings before death. We, therefore, look upon them as most critical; but if she does not get worse soon—if in three hours she is still alive, I think we may then presume to hope. God bless you!" continued he in the most soothing tone of friendship, for Lord Calvert could not speak. "Remember, my Lord, that our fate is in the hands of him who never sends affliction but in mercy." So saying, Doctor Stanley again returned to Julia's room.

Another dreadful pause succeeded. None but those who have watched beside the death-bed of a beloved object, counting yet dreading every moment as it passed, can know the tension of the mind that such suspense entails.

Hope itself but aggravates the misery; and we almost wish that the worst was over. What can console us when we feel assured, that though the day may dawn, it will never again illuminate the features we have loved to look upon? What would we not now give to recall one day, one hour, of those, the happiness of which we scarcely prized! How should we cherish now, the slightest smile that ever played unnoticed round that lip fast closing in the iciness of death! One word of kindness would console us. Alas! how many have we requited by careless indifference, if not with more ungrateful harshness! But the last sigh is breathed that we can ever listen to: and not all the sounds of mirth or woe this world can offer, can give us back one tone of that voice that we perhaps have so often heard to echo every feeling of our inmost soul.

To part thus with one whose existence has been identified with our own—to think that the last handful of earth that falls heavy on the coffin, closes on all the sympathies that made this world bearable—who would accept of life, if it were to be purchased with such a

penalty? Let the infidel who dares to doubt those truths, to which alike our fears and hopes bear witness, let him mourn, while he trembles. One single possibility in favour of revelation is worth more to suffering man, than all that the pride of intellect or the impunity of sin could offer in its place. The Christian's hope, the Christian's heaven, alone gives consolation for that one, single evil,—which no talents can resist, no virtue can evade, and which despair can scarcely accelerate. The Being that created us—such as we know we are—such as we feel we might be—had he not power to complete his own design? If he doomed us to wretchedness, why did he bestow on us so beautiful a world to revel in? If he designed us for felicity, how can the magnificent scheme of beneficence be completed, except in another sphere, where sin and death are known no more! and where those virtues are ripened to perfection, which even here produce a transient happiness!

But to return.—Midnight was past; and Lord Alton's house was as still as if the angel

of death had already passed over it. Lady Ellesmere paused in her reading: she listened as the noise of a footstep was heard on the stairs; but it was not Louisa's light quick tread.—The Countess started up as it approached; so did Lord Alton; for both felt intuitively, that Julia's fate hung on that sound. The handle of the door turned, and Lady Matilda appeared.—"I am come," said she, in a broken, hurried tone, "I am come to tell you, that Julia is much, much better: both doctors think she may yet be spared to us;" and, totally overcome, Lady Matilda fell on her mother's neck, and burst into an hysterical fit of crying. But they were the first tears she had shed since Julia's illness.

Every servant in the house had been aware of the crisis to which the disorder of their beloved Miss Fielding had arrived, and with an uncontrollable anxiety had watched the entrance of Lady Matilda into the library. Brinley, and some of the upper servants, had stationed themselves during the whole evening

on the landing-place outside the drawing-room door; but no sooner was Lady Matilda's white gown perceived, as she passed out of the dressing-room, than the other different domestics timidly and silently crowded onwards, to catch the first intelligence. Brinley followed Lady Matilda unperceived into the room—her first sentence was enough; he was in an instant back again on the landing-place, with his neck stretched over the bannister. "Safe!—thank God!" was all he could say; but the word was passed in a whisper from stair to stair, till at last a confused murmur of thanksgiving was heard to ascend from the remotest corner.—It was not loud—it was not obtrusive; but Mr. Fielding afterwards said that, to his last hour, he should never forget the thrilling sound of so many subdued voices. It was the first thing that recalled him to the actual consciousness that his child was restored to him.

Julia's recovery at first was slow, as it was partly retarded by anxiety respecting her own destinies. When her recollection perfectly re-

turned, and she recalled the last transactions of which she was conscious previous to her illness, she naturally felt inquisitive, as to the causes of Fitzosborne's absence; and, to calm her anxiety, Mr. Fielding prepared her for a knowledge of the truth by a fictitious account of his being dangerously ill, which he even affected to attribute to the impeachment and final ruin of Tralee; events to which the newspapers had already given publicity. At last, Doctor Stanley undertook the delicate task of informing Julia of Lionel's death, and at the same time, in order as he said to reconcile her to his loss, he also by degrees unfolded to her the extraordinary discovery of his previous marriage. But of any further particulars Julia continued in ignorance, as she suffered so much on hearing the enormity of Fitzosborne's guilt, and in reflecting on the misery she had so miraculously escaped, that Doctor Stanley positively forbade further reference to the subject by others of her friends; and she, of course, never voluntarily recurred to it.

The day Julia first came into her dressing-room, and the day the knocker at the porter's gate was unmuffled, were long remembered with rejoicings by that now happy family: for such, indeed, they were—all but Lord Calvert. He remained in town (nay, in the house, if truth must be told) till Julia's convalescence was no longer doubtful. But during the greater part of that period, Julia still believed herself betrothed to another; and, therefore, Lord Calvert scarcely wished to present himself to her under those circumstances, even had the punctilious delicacy of his mother sanctioned his doing so. As soon as this bar to their meeting was removed, by Doctor Stanley's communications, another intervened in the feelings of Julia herself; who, although shocked at the sudden termination of Fitzosborne's existence, and doubly distressed at his delinquency, was yet anxious to fulfil, to the utmost of her power, every outward form of respect to his memory; and therefore assumed that degree of mourning which was called for

by the relationship in which they had so lately stood to each other. Of course, that dress excluded all visitors, and more especially Lord Calvert; and thus the day which restored Julia to the society of her family, was the date of his exclusion from it; for on it he again left London, with however far different feelings from those with which he had last quitted it.

In proportion as Julia's progressive recovery gave Lady Ellesmere time to think of other subjects, her scruples increased as to the etiquette of her and her daughters remaining longer in Lord Alton's house. "It really was so very awkward—it would have so very strange an appearance to the world; and yet how was it possible to separate from their now doubly beloved Julia?"

Lord Alton, whose lawyers had been far from idle, at once solved this difficulty; and, by the most unanswerable arguments, urged in the most irresistible manner, prevailed on Lady Matilda to name an early day for their nuptials. Julia was not strong enough; nor in-

deed did she yet wish to return to the rectory. But she was exceedingly impatient to leave London ; and as soon as Doctor Stanley gave permission, she and her father removed to Lord Alton's villa at Richmond ; and Lord and Lady Ellesmere, with their two daughters, returned to St. James's Square, though not for a permanent residence. A very short time elapsed ere the newspapers duly announced, that "yesterday morning was married, by special license, the Earl of Alton to the Right Honourable Lady Matilda Calvert, eldest daughter of the Earl of Ellesmere. In consequence of some late domestic occurrences, the ceremony was strictly private ; and the happy pair set off immediately afterwards for Alton Forest."

The Morning Post did not profess to know more of the family arrangements, and therefore did not publish the fact, that Lord and Lady Ellesmere, and the fair bride's-maid, Lady Louisa, accompanied Mr. Fielding on his return to Richmond the same day. The change of air, and still more the restored tranquillity of

her mind, had so much accelerated Julia's recovery, during the few days of her absence from Lady Ellesmere, that when she and the Earl alternately folded her to their hearts with parental fondness, they both believed they had never seen her look half so lovely, though still somewhat of the languor of convalescence softened the lustre of her beauty.

"I have brought you a *paquet* from Matilda," said Lady Louisa; "it is her last signature of CALVERT;" and poor Lady Louisa, though she really was delighted at her sister's marriage; and though she had fluttered gayer than a butterfly all day long, now burst into tears, when she recollected that the happy days were passed when she and that beloved sister were as one. But it must have been some feeling yet more intense, that gave such heightening bloom to Julia's cheek, as, on opening the *paquet*, she perceived that it contained a second letter, in another hand. By degrees, the tint of the palest blush rose, gave place to a still brighter glow, as she perused the envelope;

and when she again looked up, she was relieved to find, that all but Lady Ellesmere had left the room.

"I guess the purport of those letters, dearest Julia," said the Countess with a smile. "Tell me, my beloved girl, when will you allow Oswald to have the happiness of seeing you?"

Julia hid her blushing face on the Countess's shoulder, Lord Calvert's unopened letter still trembling in her hand. "I must not, should not see him in this dress," whispered she. "I mean, that it would not be right for me to receive visits from any gentleman now; and I am sure, my more than mother, that you agree with me."

A still closer pressure to her heart was all the reply the Countess gave; for, at that moment Lady Louisa and her father returned to propose that Julia should accompany them to the banks of the river, which was within the distance her strength yet enabled her to walk. The next day, breakfast was scarcely finished, when the little party were startled by the sound

of a curricle trotting briskly to the door. Julia's beating heart seemed to recognise the well-known sound; but, true to herself, she immediately rose and retired to her own room. As she entered, she met nurse, who, though spared the misery of knowing Julia's danger, had on her recovery resumed her guardianship. He is let in at last," exclaimed she; "Lord Calvert is on the stairs.—Poor fellow! not a day has passed, wet or dry, since we left town, but what he met me at the porter's lodge to inquire for you, my own dear child: and those flowers, and the pine-apples that you thought grew in my Lord's garden here—it was my *own* Lord himself that brought down every one of them."

Julia intended to be very angry at the little deceit that nurse had practised on her. But she never yet had courage to scold the kind-hearted old woman; and the eloquence of the moment was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Fielding. Whatever his communications to his daughter might have been, or what her

reply actually was, is not so certain, as that Lord Calvert received Julia's message to him through her father with mixed sensations of joy and disappointment. In about half an hour afterwards, Julia heard his curricle called for; and, as it turned slowly from the door, she stole blushing to the window,—but not unseen: Lord Calvert's eyes were rivetted to the spot where all his fondest wishes lingered, and the instantaneous salutation she received reminded her of how many a time she had stood in the library window at the rectory, till he had reached the very point of the hill when, by a tacit agreement, he used to stop, and, waving his glove or his hat in the air, give her the welcome assurance, that, though absent, she was not forgotten.

But days, whether of joy or mourning, are doomed irrevocably to pass away. One of the finest in August shone on a scene at Alton Forest, that seems, on retrospection, like an Oasis in life. Lord Ellesmere had been on a visit there for some time, participating in the

domestic happiness of their beloved Matilda and her Lord; which was not less in degree, though so incomparably more in value, than the splendour and magnificence by which they were surrounded. Lady Louisa, too, was with them, if possible gayer than ever, though daily (as she averred) tormented by the assiduities of Mr. Russel, whom she had not yet, by any means, made up her mind to accept as a husband; "because," as she said, "she could not imagine that any change in her circumstances could increase her happiness." Lastly, Julia was restored to them, more than ever radiant in beauty and renovated health. Mr. Fielding had been obliged to return to his parochial duties at Fairton; but on this day, he was expected again at Alton Forest; and, in anticipation of his arrival, Julia had declined accompanying the rest of the party on an excursion on the lake. Impatient as she was, his carriage yet arrived sooner than she had dared to calculate; and gaily tripping down the stairs, she rushed into the vestibule to meet him. But

there!—oh! strange mischance!—she found other arms extended to embrace her; and thus, her first meeting with Lord Calvert was when they received together the blessings of her delighted parent.

In a few minutes, Mr. Fielding recollected that he had not yet seen either Lord or Lady Alton, and therefore hastily proceeded in search of them. It might be an hour or more before the boat could be recalled to land, and before its passengers were made acquainted with the arrival of Mr. Fielding's welcome companion; but ere the party returned to the castle, Lord Calvert had extorted a promise from his beloved Julia, not only that, as soon as her mourning was at an end, she would become his bride; but farther, that the term of his probation should solely be regulated by Lady Ellesmere's undisputed fiat on all subjects of etiquette and decorum.

Notwithstanding all Mr. Russel's arguments, Lady Louisa still remained inflexible for three

days longer; but at last Julia had the address to persuade her, that she would not consent to be married, unless Lady Louisa followed her example: and the consequence was, that on the same day, in the Castle chapel, these two lovely brides were given away together.

If Lord Alton's own marriage had been in some degree private, the weddings of his beloved friends were celebrated at Alton Forest with a degree of splendour congenial to his taste, and consonant to his usual magnificence. Many were the joyous peals that rung from the neighbouring churches; and not a hill that surrounded the castle but sent its rejoicings to heaven, till the tranquil lake, in reflecting back the brightness, seemed spangled like a sheet of stars; whilst the long lines of tenantry, that had for miles escorted the bridal equipages, on their different roads, re-assembled at night at the castle, and danced till the rising sun superseded all other illumination. Nor were the festivities confined to the lower ranks:

a large party from London had joined the guests, who were assembled from the more immediate neighbourhood; and taste and refinement were combined with hilarity, in the protracted hospitalities of Alton Forest.

THE END.

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